

PETER
LECKY

PETER LECKY

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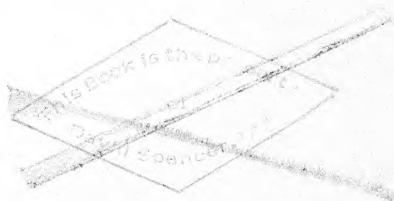
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. PETER LECKY

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by

HIMSELF



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A P O L O G I A

Le secret pour être ennuyeux c'est de tout dire. Also the infallible formula for making enemies is to tell tales out of school.

Luckily I have found it impossible to cram my every life episode into these pages. Limitations imposed by space and form in conjunction, rather than any innate wisdom, have saved me from the commission of that deadly sin. I can only hope they have also saved me from being wearisome.

As for the tales out of school, however, some of them seemed too good to be wasted. For which reason I have taken the further liberty of disguising most of the names I have used, including my own. Yet the reader must not imagine I have adopted this ruse for the sake of any important personages. I have merely been guided by the consideration that humble people also possess feelings. And, in fact, with the exception of one poet, whose name there has been no need to disguise, I am unaware that anyone mentioned in this life story of mine has achieved any marked distinction.

For my own rather useless meanderings I make no apology. Cases of my sort have been summarized by Count Keyserling in the following sentence which may be found in his *South American Meditations*:

'If a man uses his natural existence merely as a medium for the realization of Significance, this existence to him means little more than language means to the poet.'

All my life I have been putting myself into situations which I hoped might reveal to me the Significance beneath the surface of things . . . with what success I now invite you to judge.

PETER LECKY

Melbourne,
1934

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CHAPTER I

A SKELETON IN THE CUPBOARD

No children ever visited our home. The grown-ups were therefore my sole companions; and my favourite among them was an uncle who used to draw animals on the backs of long envelopes. Uncle Frank had actually been among wild animals, and, at a place called Australia, had eaten kangaroo-tail soup, which, he said, was quite good 'tucker'.

There came a time when this uncle stopped coming to see us. At first I often asked for him. Then I forgot, until one day I heard my mother say to my father: 'I had a letter from Emily this morning. She says Frank can't be found anywhere.'

'Can't be found!' echoed my father, absently disentangling his long cane cigarette holder from a pocket filled with bast, 'Why, who's looking for him?'

'Emily, of course. She says he disappeared on Wednesday. Frank went for a walk before lunch and that's the last anyone has seen of him.'

My father looked grave and made a sort of sucking noise. Then he borrowed a hairpin from my mother and extracted a nicotine-soaked wad of wool from the cane holder. I had already edged close to the door. I had been scheming to escape, and the moment seemed opportune.

'Where are you off to, Peter?'

My mother's voice had a thin edge like a numbling wind.

I stammered, then recovered.

'Only to see if I can find Uncle Frank for you, Mother.'

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How glorious to have a ready-made excuse for once! I was never good at inventing them.

'The idea! Whatever makes you say such nonsense?'

My mother rang the bell for my nurse. But my father said: 'Where did you think of finding your Uncle Frank, Ping?' *Ping* had been my earliest version of my own name, *Peter*. For some reason my father had adopted it, though invariably frowning on all other distortions of the Queen's English.

I looked guilty.

'Perhaps he's in the garden, Father. Perhaps Uncle Frank's down at the pond.' The pond was a favourite haunt of mine even in winter. I felt a need this morning to go down and see how the moorhens were getting on.

'Now, that will do!' my mother warned me. 'You're not to go outside the house, to-day. Rose, I think you'd better take Master Peter up to the nursery, please!'

In a way, I was glad of the restriction, now that Rose had appeared on the scene. Going out officially was not at all the same thing as slipping away by oneself. I had to wear boots that hurt, especially on frosty mornings. Also they buttoned me up in a reefer coat, a shade too small, so that it pressed my underclothes down on my skin, making them tickle horribly.

The nursery was a long room with dark oak beams which reflected the glow of a well-protected fire. The hairy fingers of a tall fir tree scraped the window panes. This morning the scraping was a continuous scrabble and some bough or other was creaking fretfully, for the wind was high and chill. But that made it all the cosier indoors.

One wall of the nursery had, only the previous day, been revealed as a most extraordinary wall indeed. It had always been different from the other three, in that it had three long

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cracks in it from ceiling to floor and a knob in the middle with a brass bolt immediately below it. I had noted these peculiarities, also the fact that it made a funny noise when banged with one's hand. Not, however, till I saw my mother open and disappear through it, had I guessed it was really a huge door, two huge doors rather, a wall that folded back.

I had immediately followed her, only to be chased out again, after catching an intriguing glimpse of old dusty trunks and of a steep wooden staircase, disappearing sharply downwards through a doorway in the further wall, so small and narrow that it looked like a cupboard.

'You must never come in here by yourself, Peter,' my mother cautioned me at once. 'Those stairs are too steep for little boys. If you fell down them you might not be found for a long time. You wouldn't like that, would you?'

Looking at that mysterious wall now, I remembered her words, and the thought came to me like a flash that why they couldn't find Uncle Frank was because he had gone down those stairs in there without telling anyone. With a beating heart I crossed the room and put my ear to the middle crack to listen.

Suddenly my heart leapt right into my throat and seemed to stay there, for I found the crack widening with my weight. Could I squeeze through? I pushed. The doors gave reluctantly. Greatly daring, I set my shoulder at it and shoved again. The doors shuddered and creaked . . . and there I was, on the other side.

Once through, however, my courage failed in the gloomy desolation of that barren room. I turned to squeeze my way out again, when . . . surely that was a footstep on the landing outside the nursery!

My fear of the room was immediately replaced by that of being caught in a forbidden spot. It might be too late now

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to slip back unobserved, so I decided to shut the door ever so softly and wait till whoever it was had gone. But, although I was very careful, the door lurched back with a loud click which I was sure must have been heard.

Then came Rose's voice, calling me two or three times in strident tones. After which she muttered crossly, 'Wretched little monkey! Give *anyone* grey hairs before their time!' And then I heard her hurry out on to the landing, still calling, and run downstairs.

Suddenly I realized I was alone again. My fear of the room positively rushed back. I could not turn the handle quickly enough . . . and, then, my heart crowded into my throat once more. The crack would not open. The handle just went round and round. The doors gave a little to my weight but remained obstinately stuck. Immediately I started to scream and pommel and kick; but all to no purpose. I just hurt my toes and knuckles, and racked my throat in vain, for no one came.

At that moment the grim thought flashed back into my mind that Uncle Frank might really be down those dark and dreadful stairs.

I cast a terrified glance over my shoulder and, thereupon, I became even too frightened to scream. For, in the gloomy lobby at the top of those stairs, there actually was somebody, somebody dressed in black, somebody with a white, blank face at one end and two large clumsy feet that seemed to be set on backwards at the other. The body was hunched up, too, in a way I did not like at all. Everything was wrong about it. Worse still, I was almost sure it had moved slightly. Perhaps it would suddenly spring, or slowly walk, or start to float, out at me . . . and this at any moment. I was sure now it was Uncle Frank and that something awful had happened to him. I was equally sure, although I had never had any

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cause to fear him hitherto, that I should go mad with terror if he came one step nearer. At that moment I felt sure Uncle Frank was dead and that he was in this room.

Desperately, to relieve my uncertainty, I sobbed, 'Uncle Frank!' in a voice so strangled with terror it was no more than a whisper. Then I listened breathlessly, but there was no answer; only, surely . . . surely, that something was moving ever so slightly.

Whereupon I flung myself against the folding doors again in a wild hysteria of panic. They opened, and I fell through on to my father's mud splashed leggings, to be caught up into his arms and carried, still shrieking and babbling, down into the dining-room, where first-aid was administered in the form of cake and milk. He had found Rose hunting for me in the garden. Then they had heard my screams.

No one ever mentioned my Uncle Frank to me after that. And soon I was afraid to ask, because, although they always answered my questions by telling me he had gone 'back to Australia', I felt sure this was not true.

However, prompted to boldness one day by a resurgence of curiosity, I begged my father to show me just where those dark, mysterious stairs led. At once he refused, saying I was a cry-baby and always afraid of the dark. I persisted in my bravado. So, at length, just to silence me, he opened what I had always thought to be a cupboard in the knife-room, which opened off the scullery. Lighting a candle, he revealed a flight of stone steps leading steeply upward. These soon changed to wooden stairs which resounded with a fearful hollowness as he led the way up with myself clinging to his trouser legs in the rear. After what seemed endless turns, I saw daylight above, over his shoulder . . . and then my pulse almost stopped, for immediately I recognized that awful lobby. This was the moment for which I had been waiting

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in an ecstasy of uneasy anticipation. Yes, still there at the top, was that mysterious black figure with the white face . . . yet the face seemed different somehow from this angle.

Not being alone this time, I had sufficient courage to complete the ascent . . . to find a row of pegs and, hanging from one of them, an old straw hat. Below on the floor was an enormous pair of goloshes.

The house was far too large and rambling for my peace of mind. Its dark passages, locked doors and empty rooms were never far from my thoughts.

Out of doors, however, I was far more sure of myself. Far from dreading to be left alone in the garden, I always headed for the darkest shrubberies so as to escape escort and to stay lost as long as possible. One day I fell in the pond when trying to reach an island of sedge inhabited by a moorhen and her brood. Managing to climb out fairly easily, but fearing the inevitable scolding and possible punishment, I opened the gate into the adjoining meadow and hid myself in the hay. There I fell asleep, for it was a hot afternoon. When my father eventually tracked me through the crushed grasses he was terribly angry . . . and seemingly not because I had fallen in but just because I had left my red fez floating amid the slimy duckweed near the bank. I thought the fuss out of all proportion to the crime.

Outbuildings, even when large and dimly lit, I always regarded as part of the open air, having therefore no fear of them. The cobwebby glooms of the loft above the stable offered special attractions. Over the weathered green door, someone had nailed a hare's pad like some furry goblin knocker. If, by a rare chance, this door had been left open, great was my delight, especially on blustery days when the rooks had to veer and tack in beating homeward to their nests at the bottom of the Five-Acre. For then I would

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daringly sidle past huge, hairy haunches to reach the ladder mounting to the loft, there to burrow in the hay and lie listening to the baffled howling of the wind through the pines not far away. The clover hay smelt like plum cake and from below, in continuous drowsy undertone, came contented munchings punctuated by huge sneezes and yard-long sighs. Here, snuggled in my warm nest, I easily became a wintering bear, a fox in its earth, or a cavalier hiding from the sour-faced Roundheads. Always the idea of furtive solitude was pleasing to my mind.

The exterior of the house itself also pleased me, for it was covered with ivy which housed hundreds of sparrows; and bees had found means of entrance under one part of the grey slate roof.

The potting shed was another favourite haunt of mine. The hanks of bast stored on the walls came in useful for fashioning sword belts, and there was a comfortable smell of wet mould and rotting apples, while mysterious chirpings from the bats, who found a snug dormitory under the mossy, red-tiled roof, mingled with the grunts of the pigs in the sties back of the farther wall. The gardener rarely came here, save during heavy showers. When he did, he was always sure to find me also sheltering there.

One day my father, having been sent to find me during a thunderstorm, descended upon us as we were finishing a model ship. Oddy was straightening a three-inch spike for the bowsprit, and he was using as a block a small oval leaden slab which he had turned up when digging potatoes that morning. I shall never forget our joint surprise, when after a brief examination followed by a brusque, 'Let's see that block of yours!' my father reached irritably for the old piece of lead, turned it reverently in his hands and then slipped it in his pocket. On our way back to the house, he

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complained bitterly of Oddy's ignorance, saying that the slab was a Roman burial tablet, perhaps nearly two thousand years old. The figure stamped on one side, and now partially obliterated by the gardener's honest efforts, my father declared to be the goddess Ceres. To prove this he showed me what looked like a pottle of straw borne by its left arm.

Our small collection of such finds would no doubt have been much larger if our meadows had been ploughed. But farming for business was not in my father's code. It was not quite a gentlemanly matter, besides it would have offended his fine sense of disorder to have anything so mechanical and regular as furrows defiling his immediate landscape. So our land remained meadow, yielding no increase but hay and an occasional cheque from letting the grazing rights. In the same spirit my father left all the buildings in a state of disgraceful but delightful dilapidation, whilst even a large part of the garden was tabu to Oddy and his occasional assistants with their ready shears. Whether through instinct or early example, I too shared my father's hatred of ostentatiously straight lines. Trains were nasty noisy things, intruding on our Arcadian haunts, belching cinders and trippers; besides, hadn't we once found on the line a poor badger which had been mangled by a passing engine? Parallel rails and sleepers stood for regularity, ugliness, and the death of retrospective dreams. All the same, when lying awake at night, listening to the creaky, *guignol* stride of the grandfather clock on the landing, and starting with terror every time he cleared his throat with that horrible, mechanical, rasping whirr, I found the distant rattle of a passing train vastly comforting, with its rhythmic assurance of normal human activities.

This father of mine with his taste for mossy ruins and thatched roofs, was a tall man with rough hands and long,

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untidy hair. His blue eyes beamed with a mild and quite defenceless shrewdness through gold-rimmed spectacles over which his bushy brows jutted with a downward droop like ferns hanging from the gutters of gables. He rarely shaved and he wore rough clothes that smelt of cows and horses, while his pockets bristled with grafting knives and bast, and they often bulged with cartridges as well. Yet neither his clothes nor his hands had always been rough. In his youth he had been a rare dandy, and he still treasured his frock and tail coats, his flowered waistcoats and his lavender spats, whilst, on top of the wardrobe, reposed no less than four silk hats of graded obsolescence, each preserved in a leather hat-box.

He never wore the fine things now, much to my relief. Even collars and ties were superfluities except when he drove to the station to meet my grandmother, or when he took occasion to run up to London on business. Then he would rise even earlier than usual and, having hayed the cattle and performed his other accustomed chores (*'chores, my boy, in spite of its unfortunate reputation as an Americanism, is a perfectly legitimate word'*), would depart with Oddy in the dogcart. Sometimes I would be permitted to go with them as far as the station, and even to hold the reins, a privilege I enjoyed greatly if I could get away without being caught by some woman to be washed and dressed into a state of nervous irritation.

For these excursions my father wore a rough, nautical serge suit, retaining 'for comfort' his thick working boots reinforced and refined by sober black spats. A huge chest-protector of a tie, a once fashionable but now greening bowler and a tawny, tasselled malacca cane, or a silk umbrella, neatly rolled and crushed in his large hairy fist against a pair of tan dog-skin gloves, completed his bizarre equip-

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ment. So attired, his appearance would have intrigued and possibly baffled any detective. Edgar Wallace could have written a crime story round him at sight, one of the diabolical bogus professor brand, but Edgar Wallace was not yet on the horizon so perhaps we had better say Wilkie Collins.

My mother, naturally enough, deplored his lack of self-respect in 'going around like that', but to me, at that time, however much his eccentricities may have embarrassed me later, he was just my father, the man who knew everything and who would return from London laden with chocolates and toys for me and with new books for himself.

Yet there was a lot of the boy about my father. For instance, his code did not exclude poaching. He not only shot over hedges but would even visit pheasant roosts on estates some distance away, there being none immediately handy.

On my sixth birthday, for I have been anticipating a little, my father told me to get ready for a drive. I was to wear my covert coat and bowler hat . . . abhorred uniform! Advised by mysterious hints, I surrendered almost willingly to the ministrations of Miss Gosnell, for Rose had been superseded long ago. I had been promoted to a governess, yet I needed supervision when dressing quite as much as before.

We drove out past Mount Nessing, where a circus had once pitched its tents. I experienced a keen disappointment, I remember, at not meeting any zebras or elephants, for it had never struck me that circuses were not permanent establishments.

A little farther on we turned to the left and, after crossing a ford which made the wheels and Beauty's hooves spick and span again, we turned once more to the left; whereupon my interest immediately quickened, for, down this road and about a quarter of a mile from it, was a tall, grey house

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which possessed a strong fascination for me by reason of certain words my father had let fall during a previous drive.

'That', my father had said, pointing with his whip, 'is the place which your mother's brother farmed when he first came back from America.'

'Would that be Uncle Frank, Father?'

'No, Ping. Your Uncle Joe. You've not met him, and I hope you never will. To say he's a blackguard is putting it far too mildly.'

Of course, this fired my curiosity at once. But my father would do nothing to satisfy it, returning his stock answer to all my questions, 'You wouldn't understand'. However, though rebuffed in this line of inquiry, I ventured to follow up that other still unsolved riddle of which his words had reminded me.

'Father, where's Uncle Frank now? Is he still in Australia?'

I could see that my father was now sorry he had aroused my curiosity. He seemed to be seeking some means of diverting my attention. Then suddenly he changed his mind. His unexpected reply shocked me deeply.

'We didn't tell you the truth about that, Ping,' he said. 'Your Uncle Frank was found drowned in a pool on that very farm I just pointed out to you. He went to visit your Uncle Joe for some reason which has never been satisfactorily explained. And then he was found in that pond the day you shut yourself in the lumber room. Do you remember that?'

'Yes, Father, quite well.'

My mind was turning somersaults. Dim memories were piecing themselves together. Now I understood my father's wrath when he found my fez in the pond.

'Did Uncle Frank fall in, Father?'

'That's what your mother believes.'

'Don't *you* believe it, Father?'

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'Not likely!'

'Why not, Father?'

'Now don't ask any more questions, Ping. You wouldn't understand.'

And neither then, nor at any time later did my father refer to the subject, though it was evidently much in his mind, for this was one of his favourite drives.

A little later we reached an inn whose stout and cheery host came out to meet us. He seemed to expect my father, for he called a man to hold the mare, and we got down and went with him into the stable yard where we waited until a boy in shirt sleeves suddenly burst through a gate, dragged by a stout, shaggy pony.

The boy recovered his feet and trotted the pony smartly up and down in front of us half a dozen times, finally hopping on its back for a canter down the grass bordering the road. When he got back, the publican turned to me and inquired affably if I was pleased with the animal.

I stuck a straw in my mouth and said I thought him very nice indeed.

The fat man chuckled and said I had an eye for a horse already. Then he looked questioningly at my father.

So my father paid over nine sovereigns and the seven-year-old Welsh pony became mine, together with his saddle, bridle and halter.

My first ride was rather an ordeal. Tempted by some luscious clover, Tommy wrenched his head down, thus tearing the reins from my outraged fingers. Then, rather suddenly, he sneezed out a noseful of pollen and I immediately hit the grass.

Not many weeks later, however, I was galloping all over our farm, shooting with my airgun from the saddle or tent-pegging with a bamboo lance. I was now on Tommy's back

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all day and every day, and I used to attend, myself, to his feeding and grooming, the latter rather sketchily though, so that it had to be supplemented by other hands.

It was the desire to see me grow up quickly which had induced my father to give me Tommy. The same desire made him impatient to develop my intelligence by giving me books which were far too old for me in my mother's opinion.

When I must have been about seven, for instance, he found me deep in one of those little pink 'Books for the Bairns'. I was repeating aloud, and with much glee, the quaint words, 'Br'er Rabbit, he lays low and sez nuffin'.

My father was very annoyed. He removed *Uncle Remus* from my clutch as though the book had been something unclean.

'You should know better than to ape the negro dialect at your age,' he said in his severest manner. Then, to forestall argument perhaps, for he wanted to read his paper, he produced a newly-purchased book from his pocket. It was Darwin's *Earthworms*. And he seemed agreeably surprised when I accepted it with a show of eagerness. But he soon took it away from me when I began to ask the meaning of some words referring to reproduction.

Interest in sex was roused in me at an early age by the astounding fact that women apparently had no legs. They stood on the hems of their skirts, which were evidently made so long and stiff and heavy for that very purpose. I actually thought for some time that their boots moved therein by some sort of natural clockwork needing no winding.

The prettier specimens of the other sex, such as my mother's sister, who occasionally visited us, rather suggested flowers in bell-bottomed vases ornamented at the base with useless peg-heeled feet. I fell in love with all pretty faces impartially, whether encountered in life or in pictures. My ideal at that time was a Red Indian princess, who would ride

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with me on buffalo hunts. They, of course, had legs. One could see that in their pictures. And very nice they looked, too, in their fringed leather stockings. That, however, was only to be expected. They were different from civilized women, more natural and therefore more like men.

No Indian princess crossing my horizon just then, I remained fairly faithful to my young and pretty aunt in spite of her serious defects, for she could neither ride nor shoot and she was afraid of birds and bats.

Little girls had legs of course, but I classed them with boys and Red Indians to some extent. That I could entertain such incongruous notions side by side was due partly to the secluded life we ordinarily enjoyed and partly to my diffidence in asking questions on any subject I knew was tabu. I did not brood on matters which piqued my curiosity leaving it unsatisfied, I just shelved them in favour of available interests. After I had been at school a year, however, the other boys had succeeded in re-arousing my curiosity in these matters. And they must have found me unbelievably simple too.

The head master was a tall, bearded Scotsman who wore a black tam-o'-shanter, was a minister of some sort, and oozed Wordsworth and Ruskin. His wife wore green velvet with orange ribbons and an intense expression.

My studies at this school were mercifully interrupted by a visit to my grandmother, who had taken a flat in the Rue de Romenile, Paris.

I was next sent to a preparatory school at Eastbourne. The head was the only schoolmaster who at any time ever showed any interest in me. Not that he had favourites. He was the same to all of us, yet he managed to convey to each individual boy an assurance of intimate, personal guidance. Though a German, he spoke English like a native. His hobby

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was modern languages. Under him, French and German became hobbies for us also. He did not teach only from books, but chatted with us on such intriguing subjects as silk-worms or stamps or flint arrowheads. Sometimes a whole hour would pass without a book being opened. He also imported continental magazines for us.

Eventually he steered me into a scholarship to Dover. Of course, the War ruined him. It was even rumoured his concrete tennis courts were prospective gun-emplacements. As, following his custom, he gave us pupils the job of calculating how much concrete would be needed and of marking out the grounds for its application, this rumour struck me as about the most grotesque inanity I had ever heard.

At Dover I promptly lapsed, first into a mystified, then into a stolid indifference to such learning as was purveyed in the class-rooms. I also remained almost impervious to the much-vaunted character-moulding influence of the public school system. Unbacked by early home training in sympathy with it, I am certain that system is powerless to effect more than surface adaptations. Looking back, I can see my character was already formed when I went to my second preparatory school. By the time I reached Dover nothing could have changed its essentials.

I have read somewhere that one of our present leading lights of the Church slept on the floor at school as an exercise in self discipline. In summer, I slept on the floor of my cubicle for no other reason than that I liked a hard bed. I cut a hole in my travelling rug and made myself a poncho, muffled in which I would sometimes crouch by my window, smoking a cigarette with infinite precautions, and drawing dreamy satisfaction from a contemplation of the starlit ruins of the old battle-scarred cloisters bordering the close.

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During the summer term one could join the 'bug-hunters', thus earning respite from compulsory cricket for one half-holiday each week. By taking up boxing and fives I could escape organized games on two other afternoons. It was not my dislike of 'team-work' but my hatred of a crowd which made me shy of games. Also I was really interested in the less riotous pursuits.

I made friends with one man only of all my schoolmates, a quiet person, who earned contempt by writing verses and drawing cartoons, instead of ragging some other man's study in the time-honoured fashion of normal, healthy youth when not engaged in strictly organized sport. However he was a good enough shot to represent the school at Bisley so, unlike myself, he enjoyed a modicum of prestige. His study was a museum of primitive lethal weapons, for all his family was soldiering in remote places. He was killed in Palestine during the War.

I made none of those friendships with masters which are so inevitable in school romances, nor did I note any. It is true one master actually lent me a book one day, a copy of *Vikram and the Vampire*, in which he found me absorbed while waiting in his study for a caning. Of course, my initial interest in it was assumed purely to preserve my self-respect by a show of nonchalance, but I soon found it so much to my taste that my start, when the master, who had entered the room quietly, addressed me, was far from assumed.

I was not sorry to leave school, a step which I managed to engineer by convincing my parents of a preference for farming, which could best be turned to account by my being sent without further delay to an agricultural college.

I was now five feet eleven and just sixteen years old.

CHAPTER II

PRELIMINARY CANTERS

THE English climate being as it is, the masculine tendency to employ buttocks as fireguards has not escaped the notice of our cruder wits. Hence the fable of the leak in the ark, which was plugged first by that devoted animal, the dog, with his nose, until Noah had time to relieve him. Not being supplied with an adequate nose, Noah had to stem the icy influx by sitting on it, thus transmitting his frozen posterior as a dominant tendency.

In the prep-room, which was also the common-room of my house at Dover, the fireplace had naturally been the source from which such legends were retailed. The Aspatria Agricultural College, being situated in Cumberland, enjoys not merely a cool temperature, but a sturdy communism of outlook which smacks of the viking origin of its name; that name having been conferred on the site by one, Ospatric, a seven-foot sea-rover who deserted the 'old grey mother' to build him a stead and, at long last, to leave his outsize bones in a barrow on the hillside.

Whereas at Dover any inclination on the part of smaller fry to monopolize the fire was promptly met with that most effective cathartic, known as roasting, here were no submissive small fry: any individual whatsoever who might presume to flout the common rights of the common-room, invited a concerted attack in which chairs and benches lost paint and the victim his apparel, for he rarely emerged from the scrum until reduced to that condition of utter degradation which the term 'de-bagged' implied.

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Here, too, all proceedings ran nearer the bone. At Dover, new boys were expected to stand on the table and sing for the pleasure of the company. At Aspatria one earned one's right to recognition as human being by performing one of two feats. Either one recounted a story or a limerick that was adjudged entirely new to the quite extensive repertoire of the assembled eisteddfod, or one boxed three rounds with whatever champion the chairman of the evening might select.

Not, at that time, being well up in scatologics, I failed to pass the former test. So they matched me against another dumb neophyte, a tall, rawboned man, who, most luckily for me, wore spectacles, which he had to remove on entering the ring. I say luckily, because, for reach, bone and brawn, my opponent might have been a reincarnation of the legendary Ospatric. Indeed, a few weeks later, when a wrestling bear arrived with a circus, he was, I believe, the only person in the village to try conclusions with the animal, who was not crushed down by sheer pressure of its weight. And there were some fairly hefty lads in those parts, too, particularly the colliers, who, moreover, betrayed a disposition to class consciousness, an embarrassing combination which led to sporadic skirmishes.

My one and only real dispute at Aspatria most unfortunately transpired with a particularly tough specimen of that tough calling, so that I had the worst of it. The trouble began over a Bedlington terrier, which plunged into a disused quarry where I happened to be bathing, and seized me by the nose just as I came up to breathe from exploring the depths. Perhaps he thought I was an otter; anyhow, the attack hurt me quite considerably, and I retaliated by seizing the tyke and half drowning him; whereupon the righteous indignation of the owner, who had been roaring with laughter

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up to this point, was a sight to see and a blister for refined ears. So much so that, though I was barefooted and the ground was covered with rubble, I was foolish enough to emerge from the water and fling myself on him. He promptly knocked me flat on my back and, when I came back for more, I got more; I could make no impression on that collier whatever, he seemed to be made of rock. So after a while I gave it best and went back into the water to cool my cuts — a humiliating but inevitable conclusion.

My pursuits at Aspatria were varied. I played games, which, not here compulsory, suddenly developed an unwonted charm. I followed the otter hounds twice a week during the season, climbed Skiddaw from several approaches, hunted for sheldrakes' and other edible eggs in the vicinity of Silloth Moss, and tried to swim the Solway, but found it wider than it looked. Anything, in fact, but agriculture or honest work of any sort, won my allegiance. I also liked to accompany the vet when he drove to urgent cases, especially at night when I could hold the stable lantern whilst he slipped his soaped forearm into some labouring cow or physicked a case of colic.

Driving home was the best part, for then, filled with that glorious 'something attempted, something done' feeling, supplemented by frequent 'soops' at the flask, we would waft 'Annie Laurie' and 'Kafoosalum', and indeed the whole of the *Scottish Students'* balladry, both publishable and unpublishable, to the frosty stars, while the starlit roads wound out of sight like ghostly pianola ribbons beneath the steaming belly of the vet's sturdy cob.

Occasionally I would turn up at the village forge for instruction in farriery, for which my parents paid extra. They did not get their money's worth so far as my efforts were concerned, though the thrill of donning a leather apron

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occasionally to haul off a shoe or wield a double-handed hammer was undeniable, so long as it remained occasional.

Once a week I obtained my railway fare and lunch money to attend some neighbouring stock market, ostensibly to note the prices, but in reality to court barmaids and shopgirls across their counters. As I invariably rode a bicycle, the fare money came in handy for beer.

Towards the end of my third term an incident occurred which would have resulted in my being sent down, had I not already decided to abandon the study of agriculture for that of plastic art. As I was leaving, I was allowed to go in the usual way. This was the cause of the affair.

At a neighbouring market, with another student I put in a *matinée* at a travelling barnstormer show. Afterwards we sank a few pots with the Thespians, one of whom, the comedian, claimed to be an Oxford man sent down for some affair in which he was mixed up with a Russian prince. He was obviously lying, and just as obviously had told this yarn so often that he had grown to believe it himself. But he was a cheery companion and one better able to hold his beer than either of us students; in fact, he lived principally on malt with a little watercress as an occasional relish.

The manager told us he intended to give our village a trial; whereupon we extended a hearty invitation to the company to drink with us and meet the crowd on arrival. As a matter of fact we rather hoped they would change their minds, because we couldn't afford too many evenings like this one, and we rather imagined the other students would not mix too willingly with our new friends.

However, they duly turned up, and ran for two weeks, giving *matinées* three times a week, a different piece at each performance and a curtain-raising farce to kick off with. As they never reduplicated any performance except by request,

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they did pretty well, for the miners were free with their money. The plays were the old favourites, *Conn the Shaughran*, *East Lynne*, *Pochahontas*, *The Silver King*, and other tearful classics, and their marquee was just about as matey an enclosure as Shakespeare's Globe must have been by all accounts. Beer behind the scenes, and more beer after the show, possibly tended to make it even more matey. We students of course, represented the 'young blood' element, the shopkeepers the burgesses, and the younger miners the roaring prentices.

When they left, two of the cast were down with 'flu. For this reason the manager made no objections when another student known as 'Soapy', and myself, volunteered to accompany them to help with the properties and play small parts. Without troubling to get leave, we packed our bags and went with the players to their next town some sixteen miles away. Thus it came about that we returned to the college a few days later, having been interviewed by the police in the meantime and informed that the principal had telegraphed all over the country to discover our whereabouts. Considering the trouble we had so callously given, we were very lucky not to get sent down right away.

When I arrived south for the last time from Aspatia, I found the family installed in a house at the Kemp Town end of Brighton. This move had been the outcome of my mother's determination to sell the farm, since all but my father were longing for a spell of town life. My grandmother had a house at Hove, so we were all well acquainted with the town and delighted to consolidate that acquaintance.

Had I been a little less wrapped up in my own ambitions, I might have recognized in this move an event of vast importance to the future development of my parents, who were henceforth to follow increasingly divergent paths. In fact,

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my blindness now seems to me incredible. However, there it was, and, as my obvious course in this narrative is to record things, not in their exact chronological order, but in that sequence in which they revealed their importance to my consciousness, I merely mention what I have said above for elaboration in due course.

My parents, ever patient with my whims, though never supporting them with any marked enthusiasm, were quite agreeable to my plans. So I now attended the Brighton Municipal Art School under William Bond.

I found the students far more earnest than the agricultural crowd; and this disappointed me greatly, for I had expected a bit more of that irresponsible gaiety I had read of in *Trilby*. Perhaps certain of them longed, as I did, to keep a mistress-model, but found the fact that they lived with their parents an insuperable obstacle to the realization of this Bohemian ambition. It was a great blow to me also, when I learned that first year students could not attend the life class.

With one or two youths of similar obsessions I attempted to fill this serious hiatus in existence by 'tailing' the young women who attended the nightly promenade concerts at the Aquarium and on the piers. Having spotted a couple whose looks attracted us, we would ogle them tentatively as we passed and repassed them on our peregrinations. Responsive glances having been elicited, there remained, of course, the ticklish job of boarding and cutting out. Approaching with a fine swagger, each trying to crowd the other off the object of his choice, we would raise our hats with ostensible assurance that sought to convey already existing acquaintance. It was just here that my heart always bounced up into my throat, and, unless the young lady were gifted with a diplomatic, ice-breaking manner, obstinately stuck there, for this was in the days, you must remember, when the

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technique in these matters had not yet been standardized by Hollywood. I was not good at thinking up things to say to girls. Who wanted to talk to them anyway? What our whole beings cried out for was action, not palaver.

Unfortunately, the perverseness of my nature was such that my preference invariably fell upon creatures as dumb as myself. The cheery, free-and-easy sort aroused an insuperable repugnance; so that the easier the 'pick-up', the heavier the sinking feeling that was sure to come over me when I realized I had committed myself to yet another evening's boredom, while my perverse heart was still amid the gay crowd, pursuing some unattainable allure.

A turn or two further round the bandstand, and my friend would be sure to be getting on so well with his 'piece' that, by this time, any despairing signal from me would inevitably be ignored. There was nothing for it thereafter but to get away as soon as possible from the garish rout, preferably to the beach, if the fair one could be decoyed that far. Usually in the dimmer light one could sink one's disappointment sufficiently to seek whatever compensations might be forthcoming.

It was pretty crude love-making for the most part, especially on my side, for the girls usually possessed some sort of technique, whereas I was all at sea, except with an occasional young woman endowed with enough tact or force of character to take command of the situation. In fact, I was in that condition known to the experienced and scornful, also to the inexperienced and envious, as 'skirt-mad'. To acquire the peculiar ethic of these proceedings I had to shed an accretion of hitherto unsuspected inhibitions. At first, even such trifles as a Cockney accent or a flamboyant perfume would utterly ruin even the fairest prospect for me. It became necessary to examine and re-value a lot of prejudices,

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and, once I had got over my surprise at this necessity, I cheerfully unshipped and heaved overboard quite a lot of useless top-hamper.

A tinge of ruder excitement was lent to many an evening's dalliance by the behaviour of certain gentlemen known as 'spotters', who would follow a couple on the chance of extorting blackmail. I always experienced a distinct thrill of pleasure when I found we were being shadowed. But I never got a fight with any of these gentry. That was the last thing they desired. Once, however, I *did* enjoy the immense satisfaction of laying one out with a big stone. When he loomed up out of the night and addressed us, I thought from his boldness that he must have reinforcements lurking somewhere in the offing, so I wasted no time. The rock took him right behind the ear as he turned to run, and he collapsed with a squeak like some talking doll. With a joyful pumping heart I advanced to examine the quarry. He seemed out to it properly. To make perfectly sure, I felt his pockets. That brought him round quicker than anything, but not till I had extracted a threepenny piece which he left in my hand as he fled. I kept it as a trophy, placing it on the mantelshelf in my 'studio' at home, among a host of relics, such as heron's feet, hare pads, otter bones, Kaffir bracelets, pipes of all denominations, and some *ushabti* from Egyptian tombs which I had bought at a stall near the British Museum.

Above this collection, which would have done credit to any magpie, was a gallery of portraits of male friends stuck in the cracks all round the large mirror. Those of young women I kept in a pocket-book lest my father should scoff or my mother upbraid.

At this time, too, not content with plying charcoal and chamois-leather all (well, not quite all) day in the antique room, I took to writing verse, and indeed produced several

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efforts, which years later, I managed to sell to magazines, for, in spite of my father's unfortunate leaning to ribald comment when permitted to read them, I had faith in the second-hand dealers' maxim, 'Anything will sell if you keep it long enough'. That faith was sorely tried, all the same, before I collected the material fruits of my labour. And it *was* labour in spite of the fact that I felt impelled to write, to blow off froth, as it were, from the excitement induced in me by the vicarious experience I gleaned from reading. I never thought of my own experiences as material. In fact they were not nearly so real to me as what I read. So here was I, drunk on the fumes of other men's brains, and myself impelled to give off imitative fumes; yet the twists in which I exhaled them were undeniably my own, and therefore I felt quite justified in regarding my verses as legitimate ware for barter. 'Earn while you learn' may sound a meretricious maxim in well-to-do ears, but to me it seemed, and still seems, the rule upon which life itself determines its behaviour. But it must not be imagined that I ever wrote with the express idea of selling. Nothing so disciplinary ever entered my head. I wrote what I felt I had to write, feeling fairly confident that some time, somewhere, my words would find that sincerest of flatteries, which is not imitation, but monetary appreciation. For, as with my 'spotter', the pulsing of any heart, individual or communal, may be gauged by fingering the pocket. I am not being cynical. This is a sound natural law. All my verses of that period were concerned with Pan. It was only natural that they should sooner or later evoke earthy appreciation, for even the Earth has silver in its pockets. As for spiritual verse, that is another matter. Spiritual verse draws its wages in spiritual gold, which is not recognized currency at the lunch counter.

It soon became obvious to all at the art school, that is, to

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all on whom I impinged, that I was anything but a steady worker. My plan was one that relied on intense concentration when you felt the urge thereto. To recuperate the energy thus expended, one was naturally free to regard the rest of the time as one's own. Bond did not view this scheme with favour. He sent for me and warned me to stop wasting other people's time, even if I chose to waste my own. A little later, in the modelling room, I happened to be throwing a pannikin of water over a girl who had just paid me a similar attention. Bond came in at that very moment and, as the girl had her back to the doorway, he collected most of the water. So out I went.

I did not tell my parents, but at the end of the term said I did not wish to go back, adding that I thought, as time was going on and I was not growing any younger, I would look around for a job, the exact nature of which I left unspecified. In the meantime, I continued to write and draw at home, or in the rooms and studios of friends.

About this time my grandmother died. Thus, for the first time, I gazed on death. That affair of my Uncle Frank had pieced itself together too deliberately to affect me deeply. At school, I had felt certain disturbing emotions when I learned that one of the day boys had been run over and killed. I had seen him alive only the previous day. That was the most insistent impression, the suddenness of the attack. Now, however, when, by all the rules — for I had imagined I loved my grandmother — I should have been greatly grieved, if not stunned, by the news, I was disgusted to find, on analysis, that my chief reaction was a determination not to betray any emotion. 'Saving my face' was the most important thing. Of course, my love for my grandmother must have had much of the 'cupboard' brand about it, the proof of which is that I have not found it necessary to men-

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tion her hitherto in this, my story. All the same, I think at that period I was still so thickly encrusted with a sort of false Spartan pride, got from novels and school and home examples and God knows where else, that I could have betrayed only the slightest emotion, had the most significant symbols of my life, whatever they may have been, suddenly shrivelled and fallen from me. A man showed no emotion. That was perhaps the only command absolutely written in stone for me at that period.

My grandmother looked very pitiful and frail in spite of her strong features, but I declined my mother's invitation to kiss her mother for the last time. My repugnance to touching a dead body was indeed removed at last only by necessity, during the War; and my grandmother's rigid form, lying there under the sheet, had already lost all personal significance for me. It was not my grandmother. It was just incipient corruption.

Yet I felt faintly hurt, a little later, when I learned she had left me nothing in her will. My Spartan heart was not quite proof against that.

My mysterious Uncle Joe, whom I had never yet encountered, owing to that equally mysterious feud between him and my father, also died about this time, and died, as my father had predicted — nor could he hide his satisfaction in reminding us he had so predicted — after, and by reason of, a prolonged debauch. I made no attempts to worry my parents into elucidating the mystery surrounding the relations between my two uncles. In fact, I had come to cherish that mystery as a sort of heirloom. It made me feel important to belong to a family with a skeleton in its cupboard, for I had not yet realized that all families harbour similar mouldering secrets.

On coming down from Aspatría I had joined the Sussex

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Yeomanry at the period of its conversion into a territorial unit. The R.S.M., finding that my time was my own and that I had been on a few horses (I did not tell him how few), took a fancy to me and would send a message whenever he wanted a companion on a day's expedition to select remounts. We tried them all out between us in the dealers' paddocks. I was also one of the fatigue party which marked out the ground for the approaching training camp, put up the tents, and took them down afterwards. I drew pay for all these little jaunts, and drank a lot of beer. In the evenings I would don my dress uniform and swagger and strut with the hardiest. It doesn't take seven tailors to make a man. On the contrary, one tailor can make seven men, from a parson to a convict, out of one individual, according to the cloth and the way he cuts it. The transformation effected by that dashing suit of blues with its swan-necked spurs and steel epaulettes was every bit as magical as that effected earlier in my life by the acquisition of Tommy, or, to take an instance from the world of books, as that conjured by his beard and spectacles for the 'complete man' in Mr. Huxley's *Antic Hay*.

I don't think it can have been a 'movie' film, for I am sure I had not seen one of any consequence at that time, but something fired me with a wild desire to wear the cowboy's efficient and picturesque regalia about this time. The mania probably dated from the moment when I discovered Frederick Remington's drawings. At any rate, there was no class of men I so longed to meet as the American cattlemen. Now, at my first Yeomanry camp, this latter ambition was realized in part, for there was a man in my troop who had lived for the past six years in the Argentine, working all the time up country either on estancias, or trooping cattle on his own account. True, he was not quite the real thing,

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being a public school man like myself; which, after all, tarnished his splendour but slightly. The main thing was that he had been and seen and done, in spots where I longed to do likewise.

After the camp, he invited me to stay with him in a disused railway car which he rented at Shoreham. This led to our planning a walking tour, the idea being, as we were not too flush, to dress as raggedly as was consistent with comfort and see if we couldn't beg a meal occasionally instead of always buying food. Our disguise was certainly complete enough to get us run in and questioned by the coastguards the night we slept on the beach opposite the Czar's yacht then lying in the Solent. They had been warned to keep an eye on all suspicious characters, especially foreigners. When we found they had doubts as to our British nationality, we were first delighted, then mystified, till they produced a scrap of paper which they had picked up near our camp. Then we roared, for we recognized it as the result of a whim that had come to Brian to christen the place with a suitable name. On the back of an envelope from a friend in South America he had written: *Orilla Olorosa*, in large type, and had then pinned the sign on a tree. At last we were able to convince the good officer that the words did not convey any mysterious message from the Mafia, but referred to the horrible smell emanating from a stagnant lagoon near by. Nevertheless, so far as pecuniary benefit went, our rags brought us in just one shilling which a carter with a broken axle gave us when we helped him throw off his load.

At Boldrewood, in the New Forest, we built a humpy of poles and bracken of such Arcadian simplicity that we could lie inside and watch the unsuspecting deer browsing at our very threshold. Brian tried, with no success, to catch a Forest pony with a bolas he had fashioned out of a length of

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blind-cord and three lumps of lead cut from a pipe. He could throw the thing all right, but the ponies always seemed to arrange things so that there was a bough in the way, and they never waited for a second demonstration. Anyhow, it was great fun, and that was Brian's chief concern in life, as was apparent from the yarns he unloaded as we lay by our fire at nights listening to the owls and goat-suckers.

He spoke, too, of the simple emotions of primitive people, telling how an *indio* boy had followed him two hundred miles, when he had gone to a new job, just to be with him. He told of fierce quarrels and flashing knives and of a revolution which had robbed him of his *tropilla*, for the Government had immediately commandeered all his horses together with the cattle he was driving. There was nothing for it but to take to soldiering also. So Brian joined the revolutionaries as a stretcher-bearer. Approaching a wounded man one day, he was promptly shot in the stomach, for the poor wretch thought he was about to have his throat cut after the effective first-aid methods of his countrymen. Which only shows the foolishness of dressing one's part in outlandish places, for, if Brian had been content to look like an Englishman, the wounded man would never have mistaken his intentions. No self-respecting Uruguayan would condescend to shoot a *gringo* anyway, Brian assured me. It would be considered too much like robbing a kid.

But Brian's most interesting yarn dealt with the period immediately after the revolution. Apparently, when newly landed and very English, he had felt a sudden spasm of pity for a chain-gang working on the road. At the nearest store he had purchased much tobacco, giving each man a plug to himself. These crumbs of comfort, cast so lavishly on the waters, had returned to him most unexpectedly and most fortunately, for they proved the means of saving his life.

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After the revolution, he found himself on an estancia bordered by a large strip of open country covered with giant thistles amid which lurked many deserters and other fugitives.

Carrying a message one day to a neighbouring estancia, Brian was waylaid by a party of bandits who accused him of riding that way to spy on them. They meant business, and fully intended to cut his throat. At the critical moment, however, a most repulsive ruffian rode up and, after a searching glance, flung himself off his horse and rushed at the *gringo*. Brian thought his last hour had come, but the wild man flung his arms round the Englishman's neck and kissed him on both cheeks. Not till then did his knife flash out, and merely to cut the prisoner's bonds. This miraculous saviour was, of course, one of the convicts who had enjoyed Brian's largesse years before. By his advice, Brian was put on his honour not to reveal their whereabouts and sent on his way with an additional message from the leader. If the neighbouring estanciero, also a *gringo*, would supply the bandits with *maté* and tobacco, they would undertake to return all the hides of beasts slaughtered by them and would further protect his herds from other marauders. The offer was accepted and the conditions kept by both parties till such time as the country simmered down and the refugees could disperse.

Brian swore by the gauchos. What if they were a bit handy with their knives! Where knives are carried, men have to keep a guard on their tongues. The knife is a great preserver of that gravity and courtesy which should ever be inseparable from a gentleman's speech and behaviour.

In Southampton we spent one night at a fourpenny doss-house. Next morning Brian decided it was time to go and luxuriate for a spell in his railway coach. He had been

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bitten all over. On turning his mattress, we found it alive with bed-bugs, the first I had ever seen and more of them to the square inch than I have ever seen since.

In the Thieves' Kitchen, as Brian had named the dossers' common-room where they ate and cooked their kippers, we had been entertained the night before by a professional cadger, a little mournful shrivelled-up wisp of a man, all husky voice and tattered overcoat. A pint of beer, however, cheered him sufficiently to make him anxious to shine in our eyes as a master of his profession. Having first warned us off poaching on his beat, he proceeded to divide Southampton into districts on a system novel to cartography. He indicated those streets which 'preferred' hymns and sentimental ballads. One sung these in a whining monotone, whereof he gave us a sample, and it was dreadful. We could not imagine anyone 'preferring' that sort of thing.

Taking another pull at our billy, he smiled apologetically and suddenly launched into a rollicky bawdy catch delivered with a fair ear for time and music. This brand, he explained, was reserved for bars frequented by sailors, or for private use among friends. The hopeless, tuneless, timeless hymns were, however, the steady money getters.

One other man I remember. He was an ex-sailor, now sustaining himself by making and peddling baskets. As his fingers deftly wove the withies, he warned us against the cadger. A man should not let himself fall that low whilst an honest living was to be got by peddling baskets and bird-cages. He was quite contented with his profession. Young fellows like us would do well to learn it. For half a dollar he would guarantee to teach us, not all about it to be sure, but quite enough to start us off.

A few weeks later, Brian decided England was getting too cold for him, so, through Orellana's agency, he landed a job

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as an English master at the Berlitz school at Barcelona. I also availed myself of Mr. Orellana's aid to get a position as assistant master in a naval preparatory school at Lee-on-Solent, where I stayed two terms and then departed for Canada with my father's blessing and sixteen pounds in my pocket. I should like to be able to paint the traditional departure from home in a growler, whose slow progress to the station gives the hero time to anticipate, in an elevating soliloquy, the approaching break with his native soil. Alas, my going was quite prosaic. My baggage went by Pickford's, and myself to the station on top of a bus accompanied by my parents, who indeed wore expressions suited to the occasion so that I laughed at them. For I, myself, felt not the slightest trace of emotion other than a lively satisfaction at being off to new surroundings. That I, a part of their joint lives, was detaching myself, perhaps never to return, did not enter into my calculations at all. Indeed, I could only have been happier if I had been booked for Buenos Aires; but my father would not hear of my going quite so far as that, and, as he was paying my passage, there was of course nothing more to be said.

As the train pulled out, I waved my hand jauntily for an instant and then settled to a book, even before we were well away from the platform.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING A KAID

I FORMED a surprising number of faulty judgments during the short voyage to Montreal. My initial error dated from the moment I entered the state-room where, noting a recumbent form, I made a mental comment of 'Good Lord! Seasick already!' But the sleeping man was not seasick. He was a ship's doctor travelling on a pass and his particular form of sickness was one of passengers: which was why he kept his bunk throughout the voyage, reading interminably and having his meals brought below.

At least, that was his story. Certainly he seemed a decent, harmless sort, but so did a certain military-looking gentleman, much in evidence at first in the smoke-room, who also took to his cabin for keeps and quite suddenly. I then heard the latter was a notorious card sharper who had been warned off the smoking-room. My doctor may have had similar reasons. At any rate I had my precious sixteen quid in a money belt which I removed only in the bath-room, but I felt very uncomfortable about it when undressing lest anyone should see it and suspect I suspected them.

Again, two tough-looking, but otherwise at first sight unremarkable, men, who drank no alcohol but entered the smoke-room occasionally for a mild hand of poker, turned out to be cowboys. Both wore abominable elastic-side slippers, known as *romeos*, and one even went to the length of an indiarubber collar with a bow tie which he was not always careful to attach; yet, at the magic word, *cowboy*, even such appalling solecisms could not dim their lustre in my

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eyes. Indeed, once I discovered that these and other handy elastic-side footwear had almost supplanted the long boot among gentlemen of the range, I not only wondered at the aversion they had hitherto aroused in me, but was anxious to wear them myself. Later I was to make the same discovery about the army boot. It may be a repulsive-looking thing in itself, but without it, a volunteer remains a volunteer and an amateur soldier. Only when a man so far sinks his own personality as to accept unquestioningly the gear which necessity has devised for any calling, does that man begin to become 'the real thing' both in appearance and essentially.

But my worst misjudgment centred round the dark, dapper little man who occupied the berth below mine. His pallid, clean-cut features were chiefly remarkable for the steady, wide-set eyes of bleached blue. This little man was ordinarily so mild-mannered and so soft of speech; I thought at first he must be some superior sort of shop-assistant, perhaps a department manager or a designer of ladies' costumes. The latter conjecture seemed to fit in with the two flat, black enamelled trunks beneath his bunk, and with the fact that he avoided the smoke-room to spend most of his time on deck with a governess and her two small charges. (Absurd deductions, of course, but I am trying to show you how my mind worked in those days.) His name on the passengers' list was given as H. Kaid.

It was not till our fourth or fifth afternoon out that, running down to the state-room for a book, I stumbled into the climax of a drama which discovered to me his true name and exalted status.

As I approached the door I heard his even, melodious voice, but noted there seemed something strange about it, something chill, almost steely. He was saying, as I made to

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enter, ' . . . and, Sir, if you don't, I will do my best to kill you.'

Romance! Raw romance at last! My heart sang. At the same time my diffidence importuned me to apologize and withdraw without my book. But the little man would not hear of it. Reopening the door, he waved me in, and, when I still tried to excuse myself, he begged me to stay, saying, he really required another witness.

Whereupon I conquered my diffidence and went in, to find the doctor, of course, still lying in bed, smoking a cigar and looking not quite so bored as usual, and another man who used sometimes to walk on deck with the governess, a tall, fleshy, New York German. At the moment he was looking decidedly muddy about his usually sanguine gills.

'Mr. Beerbaum', the little man explained, 'is here at my invitation to make me an apology for sundry foolish slanders of which he has been the misguided author. After he has satisfied me in the presence of you two gentlemen who, I know will be kind enough to do me this favour, he will undertake on his honour to look for Miss Firby and inform her that every word he has uttered about me is an arrant lie. Failing his compliance I shall be forced to challenge him to a duel, in which, unless he is a better man than myself, I shall kill him. As I have already been compelled to kill two of his countrymen and one Frenchman for rather similar indiscretions, I advise Mr. Beerbaum to comply unreservedly with my conditions.'

The clear, almost unemotional voice exactly suited the deadly import of the words. Beerbaum, looking exceedingly sheepish, stared for a lengthy minute through the port at the great, angry seas racing past. Then, his recantation framed in his mind, he delivered it with as good a grace as he could muster and sullenly withdrew. He was a business man of

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some sort. He was not used to these medieval methods. He thought all this fuss very foolish, and yet he could think of no other way of meeting the situation. He also actually felt ashamed of himself in an obscure fashion. All this I read into his attitude.

My face must have betrayed my ingenuous delight that such things could be. H. Kaid accepted this tribute with becoming modesty, though our interest was evidently musk in his nostrils.

'You may as well hear everything, Lecky. It would be most discourteous on my part to leave you only partly informed. The Doctor, here, knows already.'

He stooped and dragged out one of the black enamel trunks, so that I now saw clearly for the first time it was a uniform case. On the lid, in white lettering were the words, 'Hibbert Kaid', followed by a lengthy string of capital letters grouped in twos and threes. Lifting the lid, he now disclosed so numerous a collection of medals, stars, ribbons, sashes and clasps that my romance-greedy eyes managed to stick out even farther.

'These are a few of my decorations,' he pursued in his smooth, step-this-way-madame tones. 'I was seventeen when I went to the Boer War, and I've been collecting 'em ever since.'

Evidently he had noted my preoccupation with the name on the lid, for, smiling and gently caressing one of the sashes, he proceeded to explain, 'By the way, my name is John Hibbert, not H. Kaid. The ship's printer was slightly at sea. The *Kaid* is a title, evidently not a well-known one in the Atlantic passenger trade, but, I assure you, quite highly appreciated by Moslems.'

'Yes, I know,' I put in. 'Wasn't it a *kaid*, Kaid McLeod, who was captured by Raisuli?'

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The little man laughed. 'That's right. Well, as a matter of fact, *I* captured Raisuli and held *him* to ransom. I also subdued the Beni M'Teer. That's two things no other man living can say he's done.'

Then he added with a trace of bitterness, 'A man can be robbed of his reputation, but never of his memories'.

While the kaid was saying this, he had produced a packet of photographs from which he selected certain pictures illustrating his career in Morocco. As he spread them on the bunk for my examination, he gave me the details. Here was the Sultan, Muley Hafid, and here was his cousin Abdul Aziz, whom he had deposed. Here again was the unfortunate Abdul in a wooden cage on the back of a camel, exposed thus for ridicule before his execution. This rococo European-looking building was the palace which Muley had given Hibbert among other tokens of his esteem. These splendid grey stallions with their gorgeous trappings were others. Women, too, had been among the presents he had showered on the Englishman, but they were not represented among the photographs.

To condense. Hibbert, on leave in England at the time, and acting on the advice of a friend who wrote to him from Morocco, had resigned his commission in the British Army and, making his way through Abdul's lines disguised as a woman, had offered his services to the insurgent, Muley, then concentrating his forces. For Muley he fought, I think, thirty-seven engagements, and never lost one of them. For which faithful service he was rewarded with his present title, which carried the privilege of a salute of six cannon from any garrison of the Moroccan Army possessing six cannon. Thus fame and fortune had attended this romantic venture so suddenly conceived and undertaken. Then the tide had turned.

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'Naturally, before long my successes excited jealousy,' Hibbert continued, 'not only among other adventurers, but among the Legation attachés, for no one could get closer to the Sultan's ear than myself, and that spiked their guns properly. They then tried slander. So I called three of them out and killed them, as I told Beerbaum just now. That silenced the others for a while. But the attachés had their Governments behind them. Eventually they forced Muley to dismiss me. He wept when he told me I must go, but what else could he do? And what could I do either? My rank carried no weight against European intrigue, nor does it cut any ice at all outside Northern Africa. So, here I am practically broke. It all seems like a hashish dream already. Of course, they wouldn't have me back in the British Army. I'm branded now as an adventurer. Anyhow, it's a great thing to have conducted a campaign on one's own. No one can rob me of the little niche I have made for myself in history.'

'If it isn't an indiscreet question,' the doctor put in, lowering his book for an instant, 'You don't aim to start a revolution in Canada, I suppose? Because, if you do, I'm not particularly attached to this job of mine.'

The kaid's blue eyes scrutinized him quite gravely as he answered, 'No, not exactly. As a matter of fact I'm passing through Canada to another country. But I hope you won't mind if I enlighten you no further'.

I have never heard of my kaid since, but I have to thank him for one other distraction. He introduced me to the works of Robert W. Service, which were just what I needed at that period. The romantic man seemed to draw a lot of consolation from those poems. Of course, everyone in Canada knew of Service, so I should have come on the poems sooner or later without the kaid's help, but, knowing him, vitalized

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them for me. The Canadians I found were inclined to be a little too critical. They thought Service harped on the 'tough' string a little too insistently. In fact, they lacked Hibbert's poetic appreciation, which had made him the romantic failure he was. Thereafter, my daydreams jogged rhythmically to the *Call of the Wild*. I too would be one who 'grovelled down yet grasped at glory'.

I'll say nothing of the transcontinental trip. Everyone goes to the pictures, so everyone must be more than familiar with all phases of the American landscape. Yet my first experience of dining-car waiters is perhaps worth recording. Glancing at the menu card with that stolid unintelligence which makes newly-landed foreigners such derisive objects the world over, I ordered grapefruit, mush of some sort, whitefish, and an oyster omelette. I thought that would be sufficient even if the portions were as minute as those I had been used to on the boat. Well, the half grapefruit arrived. It seemed of a truly formidable size, like a small hip-bath. Then the waiter appeared with the mush, about a pound of the stuff with a large jug of cream as trimmings.

With my heart set on that oyster omelet of an apparently indefinite future, I thought this distinctly unfair. However, I tackled it manfully, contenting myself with cancelling the fish order. When I stopped him to do this, the waiter's reply knocked me galley west.

'I seen you was an Englishman the second you give your order,' he volunteered. 'An Englishman's eyes is always larger than his belly.' And with that he faded off, leaving me gasping.

This, from a being dressed in immaculate white like a surgeon and adorned moreover with that faint powder of snow about the temples which lends the American business man such a sedately professional exterior!

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'Why didn't you hand that feller as good as he gave you?' This query robbed me of my remaining breath. It came from a perfect stranger at a neighbouring table. 'You don't want to let 'em trample all over you. It's dead easy to see you're an Englishman.'

They were right. It was. Far too easy, I concluded. I resolved to adopt protective colouration right away, which of course, did not prove quite protective until I had bought a coat with puffed sleeves. Once so attired, however, the tables were turned most emphatically. I now found it difficult to convince any free-born American or Canadian that I had ever been in England.

'I'm from Missouri, son! You may be a Swede or a Fritz or mebbe you're from Scotland. But you're certainly no broncho (Englishman). Why, I ain't heard you drop a single aitch all morning.'

One other item from that railroad trip. Gazing out of the window at the unending panorama of 'rocks, pools and Xmas trees', which some wit has catalogued as comprising Ontario, my eye caught a slight movement in the gloom of the forest flanking the line. Yet there seemed to be absolutely nothing there.

I had just decided my eyes had been playing tricks, when it occurred again. This time I located the movement more exactly, and so I made out a ghostly, almost invisible presence.

Atlantean Pan, peering at the train from a thicket? Well, perhaps. If so, he was peering through the eyes of a female wapiti. Absolutely merging with her background, she had betrayed herself with the fly-fanning flick of one broad grey-brown ear.

CHAPTER IV

MOSSBACKS AND MULE-SKINNERS

WHEN he found I was set on going abroad, my father had written to his only personal acquaintance across the Atlantic, a man who had once developed some photos for him, and who was now living in Alberta, not far from Inisfail, which, in its turn, is not far from Red Deer. He replied that he would be pleased to see me any time. So for him I was now headed.

When I dropped off the train at the depot, I found the usual knot of idle citizens that gathers in any bush town to enjoy that event of the day, the arrival of the train. Among them I selected a long, consumptive-looking youth, and asked if he could direct me to Dimmock's house. He said he could, adding that he lived there himself.

'You're not Joe, himself, by any chance?' He might have been older than he looked.

'No *Sir*. I'm *not*. I'm just one of the town "bums".'

'Does Joe keep a boarding-house, then?'

The long youth laughed.

'Well, you might call it that. But it's more a case of bed than board. Joe's good-hearted too. Only he ain't rich enough to feed us. He just lets us look after the house for him.'

By this time we had reached an unpainted shack towards which we had carried my trunk between us. The long man opened the door and we dumped it inside. That done, I offered my guide a quarter, which he handed back as if it had been red hot.

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'We don't take tips in this country,' he said severely.

I apologized.

'But we ain't above borrowing the price of a drink occasionally,' he added with a grin. So I produced the quarter once more and he led the way to the hotel, where he ordered beers, remarking that usually he drank rye whisky but he was too dry this morning for anything so short. He then said he was not above borrowing the price of a feed either. So he led the way to a Chinese restaurant and paid for two plates of ham and eggs with the half-dollar he assured me would be quite sufficient for that purpose.

While Jim Lee was fetching our order, my new friend emptied what bread was on the table into a newspaper and put it into his pocket, saying it would certainly come in handy later on, as he happened to be particularly hungry that morning. He then waved the empty plate at the Chinaman, who replenished it for our immediate use.

After we had eaten, the long man said that as he'd had seventy-five cents, I might as well make it a dollar, then we could have a cigar. When we had lit up, he told me Joe was out of town for a few days at his farm, eight miles east of the town. I could either stay with the crowd at Joe's town shack, or he would get someone to give me a lift out of town.

I thought it might possibly come cheaper to get a lift at once. Whereupon he led the way back to the hotel and there introduced me to a man with a phenomenally long nose whom he addressed as 'Pelican'. The latter was a farmer who lived out Joe's way. He would be pulling out shortly and would be pleased to drop me at the crossroads about half a mile from Joe's estate.

'Estate is right!' the long youth chipped in, and they both laughed, explaining that Joe's quarter section was little more than a rabbit park.

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Six miles out of town we left the fences behind. I rejoiced. Here was the edge of romance. But Pelican quickly dashed my hopes of any immediate traffic with the spirit of the Wild.

'This coulee's open range,' he said. 'But it's only a mile and a half wide. Then the fences start again, and the first of 'em's Joe's.'

However, even this information could not rob that barren empty valley of its suggestion of primeval solitude, an effect which was considerably heightened by Pelican's next words.

'D'you see them three dogs there, playing ahead of us on the trail on the further rise? Well, two of 'em ain't dogs at all. They're coyotes. The third's Tom Whitehead's collie dog by all the signs. First thing he knows, Tom'll be looking around for a new collie dog.'

'Meaning the dog will run wild?'

'Yeh. The sluts decoy a dog into the bush. Then someone puts a bullet into him sooner or later, or mebbe the dog coyotes set on to him and tear him to pieces. They ain't any keener'n us farmers on seein' half-bred coyote pups around.'

Once more I drank enchantment with the tang of the willow scrub. Coyotes at one's very door, wolves wild enough to murder dogs, and a wide valley apparently inhabited solely by millions of invisible frogs, whose shrilling suggested a score of hidden horse-mowers.

I reached the shack just before sundown. There was an overpowering air of desolation about the box-like building of unpainted weatherboard against its background of poplar and willow bush and cleared but untilled patches. The front door was shut and locked, but the window beside it was open, so I climbed through, only to discover that the back door was also open. There was a piece of bannock in the larder together with a pail of jam and some coffee and

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sugar. There seemed to be no other food, and nothing in the house had been washed or dusted for several weeks by all the signs. After dark, there being no oil in the lamp, and only the stub of a candle, I went to bed on some very dirty blankets and an old bearskin.

My next recollection is of waking with the glare of a match held to my face whilst, over me, hung the wildest apparition I had clapped eyes on since Caliban rushed on to the stage just a bit late for his cue when we played *The Tempest* at school. Glittering eyes gleamed from a face as dark as a nigger's and surmounted and surrounded by a perfect rook's nest of hair and whiskers, whilst a hoarse voice croaked, 'Ha-haha-haha?' in what seemed meant for an inquiring tone.

I then remembered my father had told me that Joe had no roof to his mouth, so I figured this must be Joe, and what he was saying was probably, 'Who the hell are you?'

This surmise proved correct. When I told him my name, he seized my hand. He'd been out fighting a prairie fire for the last two days, hence his ham-like complexion and the huskiness of his throat. He said he felt like a charcoal biscuit. So we made coffee.

At sunrise next morning I was woken by a perfectly fiendish clatter on the roof just over my head. It sounded as if someone were trying to bore through with an electric drill.

'What the hell's wrong up there?' I yelled to Joe, who was still snoring strenuously.

He moved his head. 'Ha?'

'What's that infernal din?'

'Oh ha! Ha's a ha-haha.'

'Yes, I know that's what it sounds like, but what is it?'

'Ha . . . ha-ha! Ha-haha!'

'What?'

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'Damn i', han! Hoo! . . . hwuh-huh. He's a hird.'

'A bird? Oh, yes, woodpecker, of course.'

And so it was, for the roof was of wooden shingles and evidently full of breakfast of some sort, for every morning the bird, and sometimes some of his relations, would alight on it and sound this most effective alarm. Here, surely, was Picus himself, come to greet me on my first morning in the Canadian bush. I accepted the sign. This bustling fellow should be my friend and guide in this new country. I must never kill him unless I wished to ruin my fortunes. All the same, I reserved the right to throw things at him whenever he outstayed his welcome.

After we had made some coffee Joe thought we should go and see how the fire was getting on.

'We had it pretty well under when we left,' I understood him to say, for I was already getting the knack of unravelling his tongue. 'But you never can tell. Wind's got up a bit too.'

Outside the back door was an old solid-tyred bicycle with a sturdy carrier on the back which was normally used to transport Joe's cameras. It now bore an assortment of singed sacks and old overalls. We took it in turns to ride and, as Joe headed across country at times, I soon gathered the reason for the solid tyres.

It wasn't long before we smelt and sighted smoke, and thereafter we came on a thin serpent of flames about a mile long, backed by a wide expanse of blackened country. The fire did not look very formidable except when it got into a clump of scrub, when it would suddenly leap up, consuming all the leaves in one wild, crackling sheet which scattered sparks like seeds, yards ahead.

Half a dozen men were beating it down in the more manageable places with wet sacks or branches, while another farmer had just driven up with two casks of water in his

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wagon. We soaked our sacks and overalls and joined the line.

In two hours we had it under again, for luckily the wind remained moderate. Then we made tea, during the drinking of which I heard yarns of prairie fires twenty miles long, and of truly heroic measures to combat them shorthanded. One man from Dakota told of the slaughter of a bullock, which was split in two, each half then being dragged down the line of flame by two mounted men with lariats, one riding behind, the other before the blazing grass.

This fire was a great introduction for me. The neighbours were so pleased with the extra hand I was able to lend that I was inundated with invitations which, of course, included Joe as my host. Dimmock apparently visited a lot. In his capacity of photographer he was a sort of professional guest, rarely sleeping under his own roof. Which explains why he had no stores in his larder.

Joe used his shack as his developing room. He got about on his old bicycle. There were few bicycles about, so his was famous, as were his red waistcoat with its brass buttons, his cycling knickers, his pepper-and-salt stockings, which he wore with elastic-side boots, his battered, wide-brimmed pony hat, and his walrus moustache under his pointed, red-tipped nose. No less famous was the flute he carried in his pocket. It was much in demand at picnics and surprise parties. 'We make our own fun in the bush' is a phrase one often hears in Canada and Australia. Here was a welcome fun-maker, one both laughed with and laughed at, one who bore no malice for ridicule. Joe was what is known as a 'character'.

And he was a good friend to me. For several years I used his house as a store-room for my gear, which in fact was the main use to which he himself put it. Whenever we happened

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to be staying there at the same time, I provided the food for us both as my share towards the upkeep, for Joe never had any money. He was in debt up to the eyes and, though a good photographer, was not much good at collecting his accounts, so they just ran on and on. His arithmetic and spelling were about on a par with his eccentric garb. The corner fence of his 'estate' bore this curious legend nailed to a cottonwood tree: 'No shooting aloud on this plaice. By order.' This was intended as a warning to the buggies full of armed town lads who infested the bush on Sundays, firing at anything furred or feathered, but killing more bottles of beer than anything eatable.

There was plenty of small game. On a still day partridges could be heard drumming all round the shack. There were rabbits everywhere, and wildfowl in their season. Wild geese and swans would settle right in the centre of a large neighbouring slough, but always just out of gunshot. The geese would fly very low at times. Once, when I was making bread, a gaggle suddenly appeared over the tree tops, almost brushing the roof. In my hurry to load the gun I dropped our bag of shells into the dough. Of course, by the time I'd loaded, those geese were well on their way to the Florida everglades.

The farmers did their own road-construction in lieu of paying rates. An Irish neighbour was the foreman of the gang. I had my first taste of manual labour with him, and found it so exhausting for the first week that I had to sleep all through the dinner hour each day, for I was too tired to eat. We worked ten hours a day with a grader, scrapers, and axes. I was on axe work.

Occasionally I would get a day or two baling hay with a horse-driven press, or a few days' rough carpentry when someone needed a hand to build or repair sheds. Then there

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were trips with fat cattle to the siding, and one man found me useful for exercising his trotting horses and pacers.

I preferred these odd jobs, as they got me acquainted with the countryside and gave me frequent holidays for shooting and swimming in the sloughs. What I really hankered after, though, was a job on a cattle ranch: but such work was hard to get. We were on the fringe of the bush prairie, which is park-like country of poplar and willow, suitable for mixed farming. The soil is black, and smells of the willows as does everything else. The rabbits and sheep taste of them just as in sagebrush country they taste of sage.

A dozen miles south of us were a few small ranches where the bald-headed prairie began. Further south yet were larger concerns. It was there I was set on going. So, when the Calgary Fair offered an excuse, I went south. The bucking contests and the Indians I saw parading the town during Fair Week enflamed my yearning for romance so acutely that I visited Pat Burns' offices and asked straight out for a riding job on one of his ranches. Which, of course, was the very worst way to set about landing the sort of work I wanted. I was far too self-conscious to impress anyone. Down to my last three dollars at length, I went to an employment agency and bought myself a job as mule-skinner in a railroad construction camp on Serviceberry Creek, about twenty miles north of Strathmore. Here, at any rate, I would be in the ranching country.

The supply teamster picked me up in town, and we followed a trail of empty bottles out into more emptiness where the sprinkling of bottles grew thinner, giving place to the carcasses of cattle, for the country was in the throes of a drought.

There were Americans and Canadians among the teamsters, but the majority were Galicians who wore no socks but

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bound their feet with linen rags. They played the fiddle and danced all night, not seeming to need any sleep at all, in spite of the ten hours a day trudging ankle deep in sand behind mule-drawn scrapers. This work was just a gentle appetizer to them. Their table manners, too, were a trifle eccentric from my point of view. As soon as the French Canadian cookee planked down a dish of macaroni cheese, or waffles, or prunes, or anything at all, there would be a short, sharp scuffle between the diners adjacent to the dish, the victor usually appropriating the whole issue and substituting the full dish for his empty plate. I've seen two or three men shovelling macaroni into themselves with their fingers, all feeding from the same dish in the manner which Charles Chaplin has so heroically portrayed (not caricatured) in one of his earlier films. But these men lacked the comedian's dainty diffidence. We others naturally did not love the Galicians.

I made two friends on that job, a bear cub and a Danish count. The former was a month or two old. He led a most worried life, for it was a great temptation to tie him up in a sack and set him rolling down hill, or else to give him an almost empty treacle pail just large enough for him to crawl into and stick there, when there would follow frenzied growls and surprising gymnastics till he had struggled free. The cub had an elder brother in the camp, some eight months old. No one took any liberties with him. He got loose once and stampeded the horses.

The Dane was a homesteader, working here to make enough to carry him through the next season on his quarter section. Six months' residence in each of the first three years was compulsory on selected land. Ahlfeldt was the son of a titled plutocrat and was himself a count and a retired cavalry officer, also an ex-official of the Belgian Congo service. He

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had left the army through his own extravagance, and the Congo service had soon disgusted him, since his nature was over-squeamish for a rubber-collector's life. In other words, he was not a brute. He was still a young man. Short, stocky, dark-haired, he had a chest like a gorilla's and was probably the strongest man in the camp. If a man rolls himself into a ball and then kicks his legs spasmodically and alternately from the knees, it makes the job of lifting him from the ground very hard indeed. This was one of our Sunday games. Ahlfeldt lifted his man every time. He was also able to do a standing somersault. I made a caricature of him performing this feat. He was delighted with the drawing and sent it to his mother, with whom he still corresponded, though his father had cast him off.

Among the 'skinnners' were a small wiry, bearded negro and his twelve-year old son, a lemon coloured imp with beautiful eyes. The 'whitemen' of the camp were inclined to extend equality to this man, though refusing it to the 'bohunks'. Community of language and outlook of course has a lot to do with this attitude. Besides, the negroes behaved themselves at meals. In fact, as I had previously noticed, the negro's independence is encouraged in Western Canada. On the transcontinental train, my cowboy acquaintances of the boat had addressed, and had been addressed by, the coloured train crews as 'brother'. This was because they were Westerners and, moreover, Westerners with the cowboy manner. To be hailed 'brother' by a negro was a compliment, rather than a slighting familiarity, for the porters reserved this form of greeting for such men as looked man-size. On the other hand, any individual obviously more clothes than muscle or personality, would be addressed formally as 'Suh!'

Our negro teamster, who went by the not exactly unusual

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name of Johnson, had a musical voice and a repertoire of odds and ends of song, some no doubt of his own invention. One of his favourite snatches was, I remember:

Keep yo seat, Miz Liza Jane!
Don' you act lak a fool.
Ain't got time to kiss you
For dis gol-darn mule.

And another, to the tune of 'Turkey in the Straw', went:

Oh, th' cat had a kitten an' the kitten had a pup . . .
Say, ol' lady, is yo rhuba'b up?
An' th' pup had a kitten an' the kitten had a cat . . .
Say, ol' lady, what you tink of dat?

Nearly all our work was done with mules, of which we had some three hundred. The Dane and I were among the scraper drivers. It was pretty tiring work in the loose sandy soil, at least for me. I envied the ranch hands who passed occasionally with cattle. A couple of minutes before knocking-off time, some mule would be sure to start singing for his supper. The others would immediately take up the cue, till pandemonium was loose. They never made a mistake in the time. Directly the whistle went we would head our teams for the camp and, jumping on our scrapers, indulge in a chariot race for the horse-lines. We groomed our own teams. The feeding was done by the stable boss and his offsider, but we hung around to see there was no thieving. This was a necessary precaution, for the stable methods of some of the men were even worse than their table manners. I do not harbour race hatred. I think, with proper encouragement, any man can become as pleasant a companion as the average horse, dog, or cat. I merely record the impression I received in that camp and others. The necessary encouragement had obviously been withheld.

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My Danish friend fell foul of the Galicians one day. The affair developed into a rough-house, a battle royal in which the whole camp, including myself, joined. The trouble started with the 'steeple boss', as he called himself, who had to doctor sick mules. He had them segregated about fifty yards from the horselines. It was Sunday afternoon. Ahlfeldt and I were playing black-jack with some of the others on a stack of baled hay. The stable boss turned up with a jam pail full of liniment; but he was too tired to walk the fifty yards to the sick lines, so he untied one of the Dane's mules and climbed on its back. Someone nudged Ahlfeldt and grinned. He bounded up like a rubber ball and had seized the stable boss by one foot and tipped him off within a split second. The Galician was furious. He swung his now empty pail over his head and crashed it down on the count's forehead. Ahlfeldt crumpled up for an instant, during which time his opponent got a couple of kicks into his ribs. The Galicians on the hay with me, roaring with laughter, hopped down and ran over. As the Dane staggered to his feet, half-blinded with his own blood, one of the spectators flung him down again. I threw all my weight into a punch which downed this lout. At that moment a big Irish Canadian pranced up whooping with joy, striking out right and left indiscriminately. I was one of the first of his victims. His fist lifted me clean off my feet and shot me over a cutbank into the dry creek below. By the time I had collected myself and scrambled out, the Irishman was in sole command of the situation. Galicians were running in all directions. When he had had time to cool off the Irishman looked at me as if he had never seen me before. He was genuinely surprised when I told him what had happened, and he apologized handsomely.

'Forgit it, boy!' he said, clapping my shoulder with a hand

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that nearly drove me into the earth. 'I thoct ye wuz one of thim bohunk bastards. I kin see now ye're a whiteman or ye'd be running yit.'

In that camp they kept their meat hung on a tall pole, up above the fly zone. However, the roofs of the cook's and dining tents were 'one mass of flies strung together with a few holes', as one of the Canadians put it. My diarrhoea turned out to be dysentery. I was the first to go down with it. Others followed. As soon as I was strong enough, I humped my turkey the twenty odd miles back to Strathmore and took the train on to Joe's to convalesce. The timekeeper knocked the price of three days' meals off my cheque. This was for the time I had lain in my bunk, eating nothing. However, I was too sick to argue.

That winter I hayed cattle with a man who had been on the buffalo round-up in the Flathead country in Montana when Michael Pablo sold his herd to the Canadian Government. This was the last wild herd in the States. Pablo had protected them, and reckoned he was entitled to a price for them for that reason. The U.S. Government scouted his claim. So the Canadians took advantage of his offer. An exciting time was had by all on that job, my friend assured me. I think he said they had three round-ups altogether, for the great beasts got away from them twice, just as they were handy for shipment. On one occasion the cowboys built a big corral, of which one side was a low cliff in the bend of a river. When the last bison was in, they closed the gates and reckoned they had them safe this time. But one big bull charged the steep cliff again and again, pounding a bit of a path each time before he fell back. Every little while others followed suit. Ceaselessly, tirelessly, they kept it up, until they had worn a slanting path for themselves on the cliff face. Then they filed up and made off.

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On the second occasion they got the bison into specially reinforced stockyards opposite specially reinforced cattle-trucks. It took them a devil of a time to get the first beast up the ramp. When he decided to move at last he did it in one wild rush which was disastrous for the reinforced truck. He charged slap through it and all the herd followed. My mate happened to be standing on the roof of the truck at the time. He said that was the king scare of his life.

One morning I made for the stable to cut steaks, for we had a quarter of beef hanging there. I was met at the door by an eagle which had also been after steaks. He came out in such a hurry that he tipped off my hat with his wing, giving my nerves that peculiar shock which you get when an animal nips you suddenly with its teeth. Years later, when I saw my first aeroplane, which happened to be flying low, the scene at that stable door flashed back into my mind. I felt for all the world like a hawk-menaced hen, and just for a second my spine and all my limbs re-experienced that indescribably queer tingling.

CHAPTER V

A WOULD-BE COWBOY

IN February I had an unexpected letter from one of the cow-punchers I had met on the boat. I had asked him to let me know if I could get work on a ranch in his vicinity. This was a most agreeable surprise, for I had thought he had forgotten me. If I came at once to Swift Current in Saskatchewan, Green said, he could probably include me in an outfit he was getting together to bring horses across the Line from Montana. I lost no time in joining him.

In that little cow-town, he occupied a weatherboard stable with two horses. At one end was an office with a stove in it. The walls were decorated with reproductions of Charles Russell's paintings of range life. There were also some photos, some alluringly wild, others disappointingly tame. I preferred photos of the meanest-looking coyotes and bears to those of the squarest of prize bulls.

Later, about July 1914 I think, I visited an exhibition of Russell's paintings held in a London gallery. They were given one room, the others being occupied by Picasso and his merry men, one of whom had had the bright idea of exhibiting a sort of scarecrow made of broomsticks. In the catalogue this confection was labelled 'Venus'. Naturally the catalogue was mainly devoted to an exposition of the aims of this school. Russell's paintings require no explanation. They are of the despised brand which tells a story, and they tell it so convincingly that even a blind man can feel a kick from them. His cow-ponies are literally ready to buck

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off the canvas at the slightest hint of undue familiarity. There is an elusive quality about horses in swift action which defies the camera and which even defies all artists who have not spent the greater part of their days watching horses in swift action. The simple mentalities of the range prefer the sort of subtlety which can portray that quality. Russell had it. There is only one artist I know of who has more of it. That is Will James, whose star has risen only recently. James is also that *rara avis*, a horse portraitist. You recognize the souls of his horses when you re-encounter them. I don't apologize for this digression. If you doubt my word, get James's splendid book, *Smokey*, and judge for yourself!

Green had a bunch of unbroken horses in the railroad yards. I helped him trim their manes and tails before he shipped them east, 'guaranteed handled'. One at a time we drove them into a branding box for this operation. Once the gate was slammed on the patient, the 'crush' held him so tightly that he could register only the feeblest of objections while we proceeded to pull out the longest hairs in his tail and cut off the 'witch's stirrup' in the mane. The latter is a curiously artificial-looking plait that forms in the manes of horses which have been running wild. In reality it is the works of burs and twigs, but the people of our islands once thought any horse turned out on to the moors or mountains was liable to be hag-ridden, so the name has stuck. I have since read, in Tschiffely's account of his ride on two *criollo* ponies from Buenos Aires to Washington, that in Central America this curious plait is still thought to be the work of a mountain goblin.

Green was no longer 'on the wagon'. Occupying a stable in town had proved too much temptation. When riding short distances on business with neighbouring ranchers he carried whisky in two beautiful new angora saddle-pockets,

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which dangled proudly against his young horse's flanks, matching the rider's black angora chapajeros. After a smart gallop one afternoon I noticed Green's usually cheery face registering blank dismay. He turned and, unfastening those pockets from their tie-strings, cast them contemptuously into a badger-hole. There was a clink of broken glass but no effusion of whisky. Then I noticed his horse smelt of alcohol as well as sweat. The insecurely packed bottles had broken some time back.

'Come on!' Green yelled. 'What are you staring at?' And he put spurs to his horse, thus setting mine jumping about in an agony to follow its mate, so that I had the greatest difficulty in remounting after I had hopped down to retrieve those beautiful pockets.

At length, when I had caught up with him, I asked, 'What the hell's wrong with you?'

'With me? Nothing! I just won't keep any blamed gear that don't know enough to hold good booze.'

Nor would he take them back. So I scored. I think those pockets had cost him sixteen dollars.

Green, I found, was quite a legend in Swift Current. One time he rode a bull down the main street for a hundred yards or so, being finally deposited beneath the noses of a startled team hitched to a wagon filled with coal. Off went the bronses on the jump. The bottom jolted out of the wagon and a trail of coal was distributed over half a mile of road. Another time, being subjected to abuse from some drunk at an upper story window, he flicked his lariat over the drunk's neck and yanked him down on to the sidewalk.

Green had his own ideas about making one's own fun. On one occasion he saved me from becoming the butt of a certain gentleman with a keen and 'biting' sense of humour. Spotting a greenhorn at once with his practised

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eye, a town 'bum' had butted into a talk I was having with an acquaintance. So, when buying drinks, I innocently included him in the 'shout'. Whereupon he dived into the lounge and brought back three of his mates, whom he shepherded into the party, largely inviting them to join in the round at my expense. Green came in at that moment and sized things up at a glance.

'Hold on a minute!' he drawled. Then he also stepped into the lounge and on to the veranda as well, like the feast-giver in the parable, roping in all and sundry.

'Belly up, boys! Free drinks! Come a-running!'

Knowing Green's funny little ways, they came, crowding into the bar with their tongues out for whatever fun was going. Reviewing the serried ranks, I did not feel at all cheerful. However, when they were all served, I dived into my pocket, fishing out a five-spot, which was all I had.

'Ah no,' said Green. 'You didn't reckon I was ringing-in the whole town on you, Pete? Jack's paying for this picnic.' He turned to the man who had butted in. 'You started this racket, Jack? I reckon it's up to you to go through with it.'

Jack paid up, to the huge satisfaction of that sardonic company.

Green had a lengthy repertoire of cowboy ballads. You can hear them all on the wireless nowadays, but at that time I thought I was collecting something that ought to be preserved when I wrote them down. In this way I took a lot of trouble to get the words of 'Hell in Texas', 'The Dying Cowboy' and 'The Old Chisholm Trail', only to discover them a little later in a cowboy anthology in the Calgary public library.

I acquired one song, however, sung to a long, drawn-out

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Moorish wail, the words of which I have never found in print, so I give them here.

Now, you take one of them shorthorn cus,
A big pair of leggins, a big pair of spurs,
A four-quart hat, a little Spanish hoss,
He'll swear, by God, he's been a boss.

Sing hip-i-ho! Sing hip-i-hay!

Sing, ho, bull's away!

They work you all night,

They work you all day,

Sing hip-i-ho! Sing hip-i-hay!

These shorthorn cus is all very well,
But than work with them I'd ruther live in hell.
They think that punching cows is play
But they soon give out on a stormy day.
Sing hip-i-ho! Sing hip-i-hay! etc.

There were other characters at the Current besides my friend Green. There was, for instance, old Mother Dead-Finish, an aged dame, a bit hard in the mouth and thin in the temper, who served as a butt for the village lads when they were feeling fresh. One All-Hallows Eve, however, she turned the tables on them. The old lady appeared at her door at a moment when, having hauled her buggy out of the stable, they were lifting it on to the roof. She had a shotgun in her hand, with which she managed to pepper the pants of some of the gang before they could get away.

Then there was a half-breed youth who created a mild sensation by selling a bunch of stolen horses in Medicine Hat, blowing the proceeds in one wild spree and finishing himself off in style with a dose of cyanide. He came back

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to the Current to do this, and he did it in the room next to that in which I was peacefully sleeping.

Again there was a Cockney homesteader, an ex-petty officer of the navy, who entered the hotel one cold night, called for a drink and then hobbled out. Someone called after him, 'What's wrong?' The reply floated back, 'Feet frozen'. We thought he was joking. Yet half an hour later he was back with one foot swathed in a huge bandage. He hobbled up to the bar and started in again as if nothing had happened, yet in that half hour the doctor had removed three of his toes.

And there was another tough Cockney, a boy of seventeen, who broke his collar-bone by falling from his horse ten miles out of town. He was bringing in a bunch of horses at the time, and a little thing like that did not prevent him from delivering them at the stockyards. After that he went to the doctor, got fixed up, and repaired to the bar where he got a bit drunk before going to bed. Next morning he was up to breakfast, but retired again soon after as he 'felt a bit queer'.

These incidents, trivial enough no doubt, have stuck in my memory, affording as they did, glimpses of a world of heroic toughness, at that time gloriously new to me.

Down among the meadows by the creek, where in the plains country all the wild life gathers, I came across many coyotes, also one day a beautiful red-whiskered badger, and on yet another occasion I heard a rattling which made my pony jump a yard in the air. It was nothing more startling, however, than a porcupine's quills in process of erection. The porcupine is protected by Canadian law. There is a fine of forty dollars, I was told, if a game guardian catches anyone killing a porcupine unless that person can prove he is in a state of starvation. This rule was rendered necessary to prevent the extinction of the porcupine which, besides

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being harmless economically speaking, is also quite easy to kill in spite of his fretful armour. One has only to tap him on the nose.

Green's trip into Montana did not eventuate after all. He left town to go on his annual spring horse-breaking round. Before he went, he introduced me to a man who had abandoned ranching for mixed farming and now occupied the homestead of a large cattle company which had gone out of business two years before. Thus my desire to be a cowboy was shelved once more, Green promising to see what he could do for me elsewhere. I have an idea now that he thought me just a little too green to be any mortal use on a ranch, so turned me over to this farmer-rancher to be developed. What Green told me was true, however. With the rapid shrinkage of the ranching industry which had set in just after the Boer War, there were so many seasoned cow-punchers forced into other, and to them uncongenial, jobs, that a tenderfoot stood a very small chance of ever getting into the game.

While working as a choreboy-farmhand for this mixed farmer I had an experience which hurt my pride considerably. In town one day I had my pockets turned out by as villainous a crowd as you'd meet in a month of Sundays. But they gave me back my money. It was merely a gesture to teach me my place. I was not 'tough'. They were. They wished me to realize this fact.

The boss was away at Maple Creek at the time. His two-year old child swallowed some red paint. Whereupon his wife came running out to me where I was ploughing, imploring me to ride into town post-haste for the doctor.

There was a circus on the flat outside the town, and I reckoned I'd call there first and see if the doctor was in the audience. It wouldn't take half a minute. I came up to that

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tent on the gallop with the foam flying, wrenched the horse on his haunches a yard from the gateman and flung myself out of the saddle at him. In my excitement it never occurred to me that they would think I was on a drunken spree.

'Hold hard, Buddy!' drawled the gateman. 'What's your hurry?'

'I want Doc Keating,' I cried breathlessly. 'D'you know if he's inside?'

'Nope. I'm not takin' a census.'

'Could you find out?'

'I could not. D'you think I'm reub enough to leave this gate? Run along, son, and get your haid raid!'

This made me so mad I tried to push past the man, which instantly led to my being manhandled by at least half a dozen tent hands, mostly negroes and half-castes who promptly flopped me on my back and turned me inside out.

'What the hell's wrong with you all?' I yelled. 'I want that doctor. Kid's sick.'

'Why didn't you say so like a man?' growled the gateman. 'Not come riding over a feller.'

He sent a man in to hunt for the doctor and found him.

My job done, I drifted into town for a drink while the doc went off for his bag. I found the bars all closed for the express benefit of the circus men. 'They're a tough bunch all right,' the barkeep explained as he let me in by a side entrance. 'The last time they come here them tent hands started a razor fight and one of 'em cashed in right here in this bar. So the town committee's takin' no chances this trip.'

As I rode out of town with the doc we came on a man lying groaning on his face in the middle of the trail.

'Here's another patient for you, Doc,' I said. But when we rolled him over we found he was only drunk.

On this flat outside the town was a house with a red light

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over the door and, nearly always, there was a string of ponies hitched to the posts outside. The ponies needed all their patience when they found themselves there, for the chances were they would have to wait forgotten all night. Green made a little song about the Japanese girls who lived in that house and I added it to my collection, but I'm afraid I can't reproduce it here.

Two miles beyond the flat lived several Cree Indians, a remnant of Chief Piapot's tribe. One of them, John Coffee, was the hero of many matrimonial adventures. He was always marrying fresh wives and losing them. He tracked one of the fickle fair over into Montana and fetched her home, but she soon disappeared again. Then there was Sheeshee, a careless young man, whose negligence upset my interior economy on one occasion. We were threshing oats and Sheeshee was driving a team of young horses who needed watching. Sheeshee did not watch them. They bolted at the gallop just when I happened to be climbing into the back of the wagon, in which was seated an old man who weighed about seventeen stone. I fell backwards out of the wagon, but I did not fall clear, because the fat man got thrown up against my leg, and pinned it to the tailboard. So I got dragged for ten yards or so, and to make matters worse I had just bitten off a quid of chewing tobacco, which the bumping jolted down my throat. If anyone wants to know an effective substitute for castor oil, I can put him wise.

I certainly worked hard on that farm, but my efforts always seemed to leave my employer unsatisfied. At last, one day, fed up with squatting in a root-house sorting out rotten potatoes with half-frozen fingers, I suddenly decided to tell the boss what I thought of him as a change from listening to what he thought of me. At first he was surprised.

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My humility in the presence of an ex-cowpuncher had always been, if not abject, at least deferential enough to suit the testiest liver. He was hurt to find he had misunderstood me. He even offered to raise my wages if I would stay. I would not. I wanted to be shut of him. He could not pay more than half what was due to me until his oat cheque came in. So I took the hundred dollars he handed over, refusing to take his IOU for the remainder, as I was green enough to reckon such notes of hand unnecessary. I never got the rest of my money, though I paid him a visit six months later and yet another visit four months later still. He had a hard luck story ready on each occasion.

CHAPTER VI

I MEET AN OLD-TIMER

MEDICINE HAT is known as the *City of Natural Gas*. As most of the inhabitants in my time seemed to be 'realtors', to use the false-front term invented by those gentry to hoist their trade into the professions, no doubt the title was merited. The district also enjoys the distinction of being one of the few spots in Canada where rattlesnakes are found. You could ride out in luxurious cars to inspect the rattlesnake warrens all day and every day, if so minded. All you had to do was to equip yourself with a coat possessing reasonably tough sleeves — this, in case you should be seized by two rival realtors simultaneously — then take your stand aimlessly on the side-walk. Providence did the rest.

As riding in cars was rather a novelty, I often indulged in this harmless pastime. When I had inspected all the choice lots the city had to offer, I moved on to Calgary and acquainted myself with the suburbs of the 'little cow-town' in similar fashion. Nor did I ever part up with even one deposit. Sundays, however, proved a real problem. Where herded together in large communities, the Briton behaves on the Sabbath day exactly as if a curse had been laid on the whole land. In smaller towns (I speak, of course, of Canada in my time) the lads hire buggies and go out despoiling the countryside with shotguns, or they sit around in livery barns and 'shoot craps'. Moreover, it is never difficult to obtain a bottle of the staff of strife by application at the back door of the hotel. Everyone knows everyone else, so everybody can be trusted, even the policeman.

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But in cities there is no such fraternal spirit. Sunday becomes a sort of sojourn in Niffelheim, a bleak blank chopped out of animate existence and rendered even more dismal by a liberal disinfection with that extraordinary substitute for music which the Salvation Army has invented. The only shops open are those where 'eats' are sold and, of course, the brothels. The populace, having nothing else to do, naturally overeats itself.

In Calgary, Bob Edwards of the *Eyepener*, that gopher of the newspaper world, always popping into bankruptcy and out again, certainly put up a good fight for Sunday performances at the picture houses, but with no success, at least whilst I was there.

One of the glories of week-day Calgary was the windows of the realtors' offices, wherein one might inspect various ingenious devices, ranging from working model tramways to Japanese miniature gardens complete with goldfish. But the chief adornment of many a window was supplied by seven-foot water-colour canvases of the blocks for sale with the Rocky Mountains grouped attractively behind them.

In one studio which turned out these landscapes four men were habitually employed, until one auspicious afternoon when their number was increased to five. That morning I had been fired from my job as assistant gardener in the grounds of the Bow River reserve. With a yearning in my heart for a complete change of employment, I had gone through my belongings, selected a few sample sketches and started out in search of an indoor job. That Providence which had guarded me when waylaid by realtors now actually planted me among the ranks of their gadget-mongers. We were three Englishmen, one Dutchman and one Scandinavian-American. The Dutchman was the landscape specialist. He needed nothing to copy. His mind was

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full of mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests, aglow in the splendour of gorgeous sunsets. He was interested in nothing else, and was no good either as a figure artist or a letterer. The mountains and skylscapes were left to him. We filled in the petty details, such as the blocks for sale, and we surrounded them with attractive and imaginary civic improvements — tram-lines with trams, car barns, public libraries, etc., even citizens thronging the sidewalks of the future. We turned out two of these large canvases a week, and did other advertising work as well. The Scandinavian took and developed panoramic photos. He had a dark-room in the basement, where two of us slept, thus saving rent and defying the health laws.

After a while the land boom slackened temporarily and I found myself out of work again. Almost immediately I got a job with an engraver who paid me only seven dollars a week and refused to raise the sum at the end of my first month. With four and a half a week required for the cheapest board, that left two and a half for clothes and amusement which hardly accorded with my youthful appetites. I had been getting fifteen a week previously. So I decided to take another look at the bush.

I left Calgary, intending to slack around at Joe's and read and shoot for a week or two, but I got side-tracked into that very hotel at which the long man resident at Joe's town shack had treated me with my own quarter. The porter had just quit. I stepped into his job, which included bar-tending and dish-washing, helping with the weekly laundrying operations, milking the cow, washing the boss's car, and making ice-cream for the Sunday dinner.

Our only rival in the eats-dispensing line was the Chinaman, Jim Lee. Lee kept chickens. The lads of the village were the usual hoodlum crowd, not bad boys, but crude. It

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was considered a great joke to lift these chickens at dead of night and then wake Lee and get him to fry his own property for us with some of their eggs as a relish. Lee suspected the source of this miraculous draft of fowls, yet he never actually caught any of the thieves. One night, having a sore head, he refused to get up and cook a meal for the roost-robbers — an unheard of eccentricity on the part of an alien in a free country, and one at which the lads naturally waxed indignant. So one of them heaved a pebble through his window.

Next day Lee reported the matter to the town policeman, who did nothing. So Lee put the matter in the hands of a lawyer. The boys also engaged a lawyer. At the hearing, which was held in the public hall, we were not allowed to smoke, but there were no restrictions on chewing tobacco, nor on the consumption of peanuts and oranges. One enthusiast even sought to enliven the proceedings with song, but was soon quelled by the scandalized usher. The affair did not need any such amateur embellishments. It was a farce in itself, for Lee's counsel had been gorgeously lushed up by the crowd. Very uncertain on his feet, he produced a brick which he alleged to be the identical one wielded by the window-smasher. When called to substantiate this statement, Lee did so, looking very nervous. Whereupon the defending counsel electrified the court by claiming he had all the evidence necessary for his case. A bit unsteady on his legs, for there had been some lushing here also, but quite articulate, he begged the J.P. to adjourn the court for ten minutes. This being granted, he invited prosecuting counsel to accompany him to inspect the scene of the alleged outrage. We all trooped after them. The men of law held their way unswervingly past the hotel to the corner of the block, just round which Lee's joint was situated. There certainly was a

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hole in the window, but not nearly a large enough hole to admit a brick. So Lee found himself landed with costs. Whether Lee or his counsel had been responsible for the bright idea of painting the lily of truth through the magnifying glass of deception I am still uncertain, but it seemed very much to me as if Lee had been decoyed into this fatal error by false advice.

As some slight recognition of his rights as a citizen, however, the boys ceased their depredations of his hen-roost, and all differences were soon buried.

The cook at the hotel, another Celestial, was a man of hotter humour, especially if his stove wouldn't draw when he lit it to prepare breakfast. He was also soured by the indifference with which the waitress met his attempts at familiarity. He came from Calgary, a city large enough to contain certain white women not over-scrupulous to maintain the colour line. He expected similar condescensions here — naturally in vain. It must have added considerably to his sense of injustice to see the waitress perched on my knee occasionally, though we never suspected the state of his feelings and were certainly not doing it to tantalize him. In fact, we thought very little about his feelings at all.

So it came about that, one morning, having had trouble with his stove, he refused me hot water from the boiler. Ignoring his protests, I filled my pail. In a blaze of fury, he attacked me from behind, slicing part of my scalp away with a butcher's cleaver and partially blinding me with my own blood. The fact that I half turned at the moment he struck alone saved me from a split skull. His next manœuvre was to hang on to my tie with all his weight, thereby very nearly strangling me, until I had a sudden inspiration to gather my assailant up in my arms and stagger back to the stove. Once I had him seated on the fire, the day was mine. I

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can still remember the look of surprise and fear his face assumed the moment his pants started to burn. Up till then there had been very little indication from his expression that we were not engaged in a friendly rough and tumble. The subtleties of the Celestial countenance are nice.

He lost his job over that little fracas, and he had to pay the doctor's bill for patching both of us; the boss stopped it out of his wages. I felt genuinely sorry for Lee, for that farce in the courthouse suggested how little chance an alien, ill acquainted with the language of the country, has of obtaining justice. I could not feel sorry for my assailant, though I could sympathize with the baffled fury which sent him also seeking legal advice. Lee told me about this, having had a letter from his compatriot. Anyway, nothing more came of it.

Among the diversions indulged in by the lads of the village was the riding of (or failing to ride) buck jumpers, also cattle, when there was a bunch in the railroad corrals. In sailing off the back of an energetic steer one day, I landed at the feet of a bronzed and grizzled individual who had just arrived in town, driving a string of pack-ponies before him. This was George Locke, a noted character thereabouts, at present carrying on a trading business with the Indian trappers, who came out of the remoter valleys of the Brazeau river country to visit him at a small post he had established not far from the source of the Saskatchewan River. George also acted as guide to a select clientele of wealthy sportsmen who came from New York and elsewhere to shoot big game. His client of the moment was a New York banker. Years later, in Amiens, I was to meet this banker's brother in the uniform of an American Army doctor, and a chance remark of mine addressed to a Canadian led to the revelation that this doctor also had been hunting with George. He remembered

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the names and peculiarities of George's star pack-ponies, each of whom had a pronounced character of his own.

Locke was one of Joe's friends. When in town, he used to rent Joe's town shack, using it as a temporary store and workshop until he could get his furs shipped on the rail and his outfit ready for the next trip.

Having seen his banker client off on the train, George now set about preparing for the trail again. This time there would be no clients. He was meeting the Indians to trade for their Fall catch. I was naturally delighted when he invited me to go with him. Here was realization for my dreams at last, nor did the realization prove disappointing. I enjoyed my trip into the mountains more than anything I had ever experienced before.

It being mid-November and the snow due soon, we travelled prepared for any sort of road. We started off with a wagon, reinforced by a string of pack-ponies to be substituted for wheels in case of need. George had a set of sleigh-runners cached along the trail. These also might come in handy.

Our freight was trade goods, consisting of groceries, prints, shirts, blankets, portable tin stoves, rifles and ammunition, a few steel traps, axes, and a small packet of ribbons, beads and mouth organs. We shod our horses and carried caulks to screw into the shoes after the freeze-up. We also carried enough grain to give the ponies a double handful each twice a day. For the rest, once the snow came, they would have to rustle a living from bark, moss, and such scraps as they could clean up after our own meals. They eagerly accepted crusts, fish-bones, bacon rind, and empty jam and lard pails, and would fight each other for preference at our table. Only after we had washed our dishes and there was nothing else to be hoped for would they drift away to forage. I had heard

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of cattle in the Argentine eating cake made of locusts, and I had also been told that the first ponies imported into the Klondyke were fed on dried fish. But this was the first time I had seen ponies crunching bacon-bones and licking lard.

What charmed me about this trip was the sense of security. George was a real frontiersman. He had come west at the age of sixteen, just in time to take part in the Red River Rising, during which he had driven a freight team in Major Steel's supply column. He was thoroughly at home in the wilderness, and he made me feel at home too. The world was our house and the pine trees were our walls. Life had become really large at last. We sat long each night by a blazing fire of pine roots, yarning, smoking, and drinking billy after billy of tea. It was just as warm by our fire as in a parlour, and we could sit there with our coats off. But a few yards beyond the ruddy circle cast by the flames, once the snow had come, the night was the twin of those in the arctic circle. The ponies' hobble-chains clanked in the stillness, which was also broken at times by the cracking of frozen sap in the trees, and at others by the howling of coyotes and timber wolves. The stars glittered metallically. You would almost swear they were responsible for that mysterious crackling made by the sap, which is louder than the popping of broom pods in England or of mulga pods in Australia. The northern lights flickered their *arpeggios* across the boreal horizon. And we sat on our pack covers in great content, our bellies full of bacon and beans and our hearts full of peace. To furnish a healthy man, unhaunted by any malignity of conscience, with a snug home, how little is needed!

In crossing the Clearwater, we had an accident which wet us both to the middle, and this in water jostling with cake ice. We tried to cross too near to a riffle, for naturally the

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closer you are above a fall, the shallower is the fording. Our wagon was swept over, team and all. I had already crossed with the spare horses, so I had to return with a couple of ponies and hitch them on to pull the others clear. That cost us close upon an hour's continuous wetting. We did not get ashore till after sunset. Our clothes froze stiff on us the moment we left the water. There was no dry wood near the bank, so we had to travel another half mile before we could camp. When we unharnessed at last and had to thaw out the frozen buckles with our bare hands I felt like dying of misery. Yet, once the horses were free and we had lit a fire, we began to revive, and, in an hour's time, full of scalding tea and bacon fat, sitting naked on lopped spruce boughs by a huge fire, whilst our clothes and blankets dried a bit, we were as happy as larks. Next morning neither of us had even a cold to show for it, though we were more than pleased to strike a trapper's cabin the very next night, and to spend there a very frowsty evening, with the door shut, in an atmosphere solid with tobacco fumes and the steam of drying clothes.

Apropos of comfort, George said: 'I've enjoyed myself a bit at times, but only one time have I really purred with delight. I was as wet as water itself, as wet as we were last night, and I hadn't a dry thing with me. Then I came on a deserted shack, quite empty except for an old pair of German socks (lumbermen's stockings) full of twigs and with a mouse nest in one of them. But they were dry, boy, bone dry! I got a fire going and peeled off my clothes and, I tell you, it wasn't long before that mouse had to find a new home. Pleasure! It's contrast does the trick every time, not wealth and luxury.'

The owner of this cabin, our host, was an old friend of George's, and an ancient one as well, being well over seventy

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but as spry as a boy. He was long and leathery and his grey beard was almost as long as himself. He hailed from Virginia and claimed he had never been in a railway train in his life, having hoofed the whole distance on two or four legs. He also told us some hair-raising Indian yarns in the good old 'pesky varmint' style. No doubt we were being treated to a percentage of truth, but there seemed to be quite a bit of mythology thrown in. In his barn there were a few bear skins, including that of a grizzly he had trapped not half a mile away. George told me this grizzly had done considerable damage to the old man's reputation, for some prospectors had found it in his trap and, after apprising him of it, had gone along to see the fun. The old man was for finishing off the bear with an axe, Indian fashion, to save cartridges and incidentally to parade his nerve; but Silvertip had a loop in the chain and so, when approached, was able to achieve quite a creditable rush. The old man thought the bear had broken the chain. He dropped his axe and skinned up the nearest tree. The prospectors, enjoying the show from a safe distance, waxed ribald and inquired in the purest Virginian (as enunciated by the old man) why he had 'clumb' that spruce. Old man concluded to waste a shell or two after all, and eventually he 'drug the b'ar out an' skun him'. But his reputation was ruined.

However, he died up to his principles, according to a letter I had from Joe during the War, for the gaunt, grizzled old carcass was found frozen stiff on the trail, seventy miles from Rocky Mountain House.

We proceeded next day. Sometimes the foothill country was very rough indeed and we had to 'snub' the wagon down grades. That is, we attached a rope to the rear axle and passed it round the bole of a tree. I hung on to the bend with all my weight and paid it out slowly while George

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yanked the team back on their haunches and let them down by inches at a time. When we got nearly to the end of the rope, George would block the wheels and we'd take another 'snub'. Other days we passed through monotonous muskegs of gloomy tamarisks heavily draped with the mournful Spanish moss. The long grey, weeping whiskers of this depressing parasite are wasted in the wilderness. They should be harvested and sold to undertakers as funeral trappings. There was no life in these muskegs, save an occasional musk rat.

Then there were miles and miles of ghost pines. Dead timbers, still standing to mark the track of some vast forest fire. In contrast there were river meadows, offering coarse hay for the horses and snug shelter for ourselves in their belting pines. Here sometimes we found teepee poles left standing on old camping grounds, to be used by whites and Indians alike as supports for their wind-breaks. Fresh water was to be had from the river with the aid of an ice-spear in lieu of the melted snow which we used when water was unavailable. The ponies ate snow to stay their thirst. We also melted it for them. It took ten buckets of snow to make one of water, a slow job.

One day we had a series of accidents. I drove the wagon into a solid tree stump hidden beneath the snow and smashed a wheel. We abandoned the wagon and proceeded with the packs and saddle horses. That night one of the ponies, new to the trail, elected to hike home. She travelled twenty miles in hobbles and crossed one river. She must have gone some, but that going was nothing to the burst of speed she put up when eventually found and headed back for camp with the hobbles off and the enraged George on her back. In the meantime, I, the perennial tenderfoot, the evergreenhorn, had wandered into a dead-fall bear-trap and

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was lucky to escape a broken back. My upright progression saved me from the fate intended for bruin but I got a bad scare and a slight bruise, for the heavy pole actually scraped my shoulders as it fell. The trapper had omitted to tie a red rag to the contraption, which is the usual custom, seeing that tenderfeet will wander even into the most unlikely corners, so that even bear traps have to be rendered fool proof.

CHAPTER VII

LO, THE POOR INDIAN

THE mountains hovered above us like some dream of Olympus. Day after day we crept on and seemed to get no nearer. Eventually, one night at full moon, we kept going instead of camping a half hour before sunset as usual, and so, after two or three hours of night travel, we entered the mountains proper by the Saskatchewan Gap.

Below us the rapids chuckled and gurgled. Above and about towered the cathedral pines, throwing huge patches of mysterious velvet shadow. It seemed to me as if I were riding in a dream. Yet I had to keep my eyes skinned, for the trail was of the roughest and crossed here and there by fallen timber, amid which more than once some pony managed to scrape off its pack. Once the load starts to sag sideways, a few determined bucks will do the rest.

Snowball, our equine clown, was responsible for most of the trouble. He was a stare-ribbed Indian cayuse with a dirty green and yellow coat that had once been white. He had a pink face like a baby's and innocent blue eyes, and he was always in trouble of some sort. He worshipped Rowdy, our lead pony, a chunky brown, evil-tempered (with other horses), shock-maned pirate, always in good condition, a self-sufficient battler at all times, and a despiser of weaker horses and of Snowball in particular. Whenever the ponies made a raid on our packs (and they did so more than once each night . . . scrunch, squeak, scrunch on cautious feet over the crusted snow, then stealthy fumlblings followed by ripping sounds and strings of curses from our rudely

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awakened selves) . . . Rowdy was sure to be in the lead, and Snowball just as surely would be the unfortunate mutt, last to arrive and depart, who got a drubbing with the handiest neck-yoke or axe handle. Snowball was the essence of slow motion. He couldn't even eat at a respectable rate and so had to be protected at 'berry' time from the raids of snaky neck and bared teeth of other ponies who had long since wolfed their own pittance. Snowball also invariably straggled behind the string. Every little while, however, he would remember his hero, Rowdy, and would yearn to nip his tail; whereupon he would break into a sudden awkward canter, barge past the other ponies and forge to the lead. He usually chose a spot where the trail narrowed, for these periodic demonstrations of the Jonathan spirit. Hence the bagatelled packs. This particular evening he performed a miracle. He missed his footing and fell a sheer fifteen feet over a steep ledge, landing upside down on his pack and bounding and rolling and sliding another fifty yards or more *en route* for the river and the chuckling rapids below. Yet he managed to regain his feet and to scramble up again entirely without any coercion and with his pack still firmly clamped to his back, though a trifle slewed, and nothing lost but one billy with a weak handle. And didn't he look ashamed of himself, with everyone, ponies and all, laughing at him! Oh yes, horses laugh, and very old-fashioned expressions they wear, too, when tickled, as old-fashioned as the Sense of Humour which was here before Adam. Horses laugh with their eyes, just as dogs do, only, with dogs, you are misled into thinking their mouths are laughing too.

We camped just inside the mountains in a meadow, after scaling a steep slope of shale and skating down its farther side. That night it snowed for the first time as if it meant it, though there had been cake ice in the rivers for weeks. We

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had one unshod horse, the biggest and heaviest and awkwardest in the string. He could not negotiate a steep bank we came to next morning. After trying to drag and shove him in vain, George decided to go on with the string, leaving me to pull the pack off the clumsy one and turn him loose. Having done this, I transferred the pack to my saddle horse, stuck my saddle on top of it and led my pony up the bank into a whirling flurry of snowflakes in which I soon lost the trail, though, as I could hear the river every little while, I wasn't anxious. I had only to follow it and keep on following it till I caught up with George or reached his shack.

Earlier in the day, when the snow had let up for a while, we had seen a bunch of Indians like a string of brightly coloured beads way down in the valley on the farther bank of the river. They were shifting camp, and the dogs and children were making a fine halloo chasing rabbits. This was romance for me. I had always dreamed of meeting the noble Red Man in his more or less unspoiled state. John Coffee and Sheeshee and the others had been clad in overalls and shirts, many shirts, one piled on top of the other; but these men, I could see even at that distance, wore blankets and not much else. Ever since we had threaded the gap by moonlight I had been in a blissful trance. The goal was in sight. That narrow funnel between the mountains was like Alice's rabbit hole. I was tumbling into Wonderland, a wonderland where totems spoke to their human progeny. Now the cup of my bliss was to be filled, for, after a halt and a consultation, two of the brightly-coloured dots spurred their horses on to the ice, forded the pale green open water in the river's centre, scrambled up on to the ice on our side, gained the bank and came swooping up at us with wild yells and brandished rifles, to yank their winded ponies on to their haunches in the barbarous fashion dear to savages of all colours.

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These two Indians were old friends of George. They how-doed us and exchanged news. Then, accepting a plug of 'chewing' each, they turned and set off at the gallop back to their family.

I was reviewing this scene as I stumbled through the snow, happy to be in the Indian country at last, and not caring much if I turned up late for supper, or even if I lost my way and had to camp on my own. The whirling snowflakes somehow suggested a combination of Alice's white rabbit (for I said just now I was in Wonderland) and Wabasso, the hare, the Spirit of the North, mentioned in *Hiawatha*.

Curiouser and curiouser! And then I heard a wild wailing in the flurry of whiteness just ahead of me. Stumbling towards it, eyes agog for a banshee or the redskinned equivalent thereof, I came on a cold and fretful squaw, spanking a cold and fretful papoose. They were Master and Mrs. Joshua Twin, as I learnt later, and they were out gathering fuel for the family teepee, which glowed like a fog-bound sun not many yards away. The head of the family stepped out at my approach, a tall, white-haired patriarch, straight as a reed, standing barefoot in the snow, clad only in a blanket coat and a coloured handkerchief, the latter bound around his temples against the neuralgic winds. From behind him came the voices of children, and soft laughter like the fluttering of moths and the twittering of snowbirds. As he greeted me, two tousled, fawn-eyed faces appeared, shyly peeping from the teepee door.

'M'bostayitch', he smiled, which I had already learnt is Stoney for 'How-do!'

But that was the exact extent of my knowledge of his language, so I had to fall back on English and Cree, the latter being the trade language of the tribes east of the mountains.

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'How far George's house? Tanta-too moostick?' I asked.

He answered in fair English, 'Maybe one mile (holding up one finger to help out the meaning). One creek. Two creek. You go two creek, you see it.' Then, 'You come in?' I indicated my pony and said I wanted to get along and get the pack off.

'Snow go!' he prophesied with a wave of the hand, indicating his meaning. Obviously he meant it would stop. So I took his word for it and hung the pony on a twig, for I was curious to see the inside of a teepee.

The tent was of canvas draped round the usual teepee poles. A cheery fire burnt on the central hearth, the smoke passing out through the roof under normal conditions, though, just now, what with the downward driving snow, it preferred to stay inside. The floor was carpeted with spruce boughs neatly thatched and, on these were skins and blankets. Some strips of untanned buckskin lay about with the long grey hairs still on. Various articles hung from the poles by buckskin thongs; a couple of saddles lay against the wall, also a gun in a buckskin case and a bow and some arrows. Knives and cooking pots completed the furniture.

There was a meat stew on the fire and a little girl stirred it from time to time with a peeled stick. Offered a portion, I got a pannikin from my saddle and ladled myself out a helping of the soup, which I sipped and enjoyed. It seemed rather smoky and a bit greasy, but it would have taken a lot to put me off a hot drink in that weather. The three children huddled shyly behind their father, watching me furtively like the wild things they were. They were as pretty as little animals. No doubt this ancient had older children, grown up children, but they had flown. The youngest had a strap strung with sleigh bells in her hand. She shook it defiantly once in a while and then lost courage when she saw she had

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attracted my attention, and hid her face in her hands. They all wore little blanket coats, but badly tattered, exposing the golden skin in places.

The snow had cleared by the time I had finished my soup and filled a pipe, so I left the tent just as the squaw and the fretful one returned, staggering under a load of sticks. Joshua Twin walked a few paces with me to the edge of the nearest creek, and then pointed out the path on the other side. Several Indian ponies were wandering about the flat but there were no dogs fortunately. Dogs up country are apt to be impetuous with strangers.

In a little while I saw the shack and, reaching the door, heard and smelt fried meat. I was into a meal almost before my pony had gobbled her oats.

There was no roof to the shack, so everything was snowed up. But we soon rigged a canvas roof over half of it, which made things a bit more snug. From one of the beams hung a canvas bag containing ships' biscuits. It was rather badly chewed on one side. Opening it, we found a nest of young squirrels, which George promptly murdered in spite of my protests.

'You'll find plenty more,' he growled. 'They're a god-damned nuisance. Pretty near as bad as the mountain rats. They're too trifling to eat, and their skins tear as soon as you look at 'em. They're just a bunch of bums.'

There certainly were plenty more squirrels. You couldn't lay anything eatable on the table (there was a table) without the risk of having it whisked away by one of the little grey devils, who would pop over the long walls two or three at a time, to cling there upside down and swear in the querulous voices of born scolds. They were worse than tame. They were positively civilized.

Another bad thief was the whisky-jack, the large grey

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shrike. One swooped down on us one day and carried off a chunk of butter I had just turned out of a can. He wiped it off his beak on to a bough, but dropped it when he started pecking operations, so we got most of it back again. Then there was the incident of the mouse suicide in the pickle jar. The corpse was not discovered until the jar was nearly finished.

We lived pretty well, for besides our groceries we could get grouse, rabbits, and trout with very little trouble, while we bought venison, bear and moose meat from the Indians, paying them a cent a pound. It takes a good hunter to track and kill a moose. Deer are easier to get, but not too easy all the same, unless you walk on to one by accident or wake up, as I did one morning, to see one feeding with the horses.

I had no wish to monkey with bears, and George was too lazy to hunt when he could get Indians to do it for him. Hunting lacked the thrill of novelty for him. George had claw marks on his back, where a bear had done the hunting one day way up on the Coppermine. It was lucky for George he had a partner on that trip who was a dead shot.

On another occasion a bear had got rather familiar with him and had paid for it with its life. George had camped, using a huge tree as a windbreak and building his fire in the lee of the tangle of roots. The wind shifted and blew the smoke into the hole in which the roots had once anchored the fallen giant. Suddenly with a rumbling growl, a large lump of something up-reared from the hole and rushed blindly across the fire and away into the night, scattering the blazing boughs and barging George over as it rushed past. George said it happened so quickly he thought at first an enormous boulder had fallen out of the hole and bounded through his camp. Next day, George tracked the bear up and added injury to insult. He said he knew the bear would not

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have gone far, for when woken from their winter sleep they are too dozey to think of anything but getting back to their holes.

Locke was a man of many adventures, including the acquisition and disposition of half a dozen small fortunes made out of such varied material as buffalo hides, horses, copper ore, and furs. During the Red River Rising he had seen the charred remains of the tortured victims at Duck Lake, and had seen Big Bear's Crees routed in battle. He had been in the freighting business between Winnipeg and Edmonton when the plains were entirely unsettled and the teamsters froze over buffalo chip fires in winter and did a perish for water in summer. He had carried government moneys safely over the Marias Crossing in Montana when that post was the toughest joint in a really wild and woolly West. Telling me of this, he expressed a view that the best way to hide valuables is to act as if you had nothing to hide, for concealment is useless against expert thieves. Acting on this principle, he had distributed the notes he carried among the various small bags that held his tea, sugar, and beans, and had left his saddlery and camp gear stacked in the stable of the hotel at which he had made a point of sleeping, for he reckoned the smart Alecs would naturally count on a man, who had anything to lose, camping on his own outside the town. This plan had worked admirably. It is hard for anyone of the modern generations, he assured me, to realize how many bad men there were clustered in those days about the Line between Canada and the States; for by dodging back and forth across that convenient border they continually contrived to hold up legal pursuit. Thin settlement and difficult communications made this easy for them.

On another occasion, riding by chance on to two men branding cattle, George had found it expedient to reach

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upwards with both hands in a hurry and to stay put in that tiresome attitude while the men put a few pertinent questions. Upon his assuring them he was a stranger having neither property nor personal interests in that country, and now he came to think of it, was suffering from temporary blindness, they had allowed him to turn his horse around and go about his business by way of a wide detour. In this connection he told me an amusing story of a man who had assured him he had stood stock still whilst a centipede crawled up the leg of his pants and down again. Congratulated on his nerve, this man had modestly disclaimed any initiative in the matter. His hands had been above his head and he had been gazing down a gun barrel at the time.

George had put in a lot of time prospecting. He had a couple of good yarns about futile hunts for gold on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, one of them offering the enhanced interest of the personal touch. It seems that, although the rivers flowing eastward from the great watershed show alluvial gold in their sands and gravels, enough even to pay wages in some places, no one has ever discovered the parent lodes. Washing gold is therefore only profitable as a sideline to the gravel industry which, of course, is only practised near cities where road-making is in progress. Years ago, however, high hopes were entertained of striking it rich in the Alberta Rockies. One party of prospectors left Butte, Montana, to chase this *fata morgana* and disappeared entirely. About two years later a poor, half-witted creature reached Butte and claimed to be the sole survivor of the party. He said they had located a creek literally paved with gold, but had been surprised by Indians when working, and all his mates had been butchered. He, himself, had been taken prisoner and subsequently sold to the Blackfeet as a slave. At last he had escaped. After a spell of rest, he was

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induced to lead a fresh party back in search of the alleged find. He seemed to have only the vaguest idea of its location, and he died on the road before even approximating it.

Locke's second story concerned himself. Way back in the early 'nineties a half-breed had come to George's brother Jim, displaying a necklace of raw nuggets, fairly chunky slugs too. He said that his mother, a Blackfoot woman, had given him this necklace on her deathbed, and had told him to make use of it to enrich himself. Following the Indian belief that to reveal the source of gold brings bad fortune to an Indian, she had never shown him the necklace before. His white blood, however, would make him immune. She said that his father, a Russian prospector, one time when they were travelling, had sent her down to a creek to fetch water as he had been suddenly taken sick. She had noticed many curious red pebbles in the creek, but had not stopped to collect more than one specimen, which she took back to her man with the water. He had become greatly excited. Unable to move, however, he had sent her to collect all she could. Returning again she had found her man dying. He had told her to keep the pebbles and give them to their baby when he had grown up, but never to show them to anyone else. She had bound them on a string into this necklace.

The half-breed, although he had lived among Indians all his life, professed to be no slave to their superstition, and offered to lead the brothers to the creek his mother had described to him. The necklace seemed fairly convincing evidence, so an agreement was made. After they had been out a couple of weeks and had, according to the breed, approximately reached their goal, the latter became very nervous. One night he sat by the fire all through the dark hours, and at dawn, said his wife was sick and he must go back to her at once. They were entirely in his hands, since

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he alone possessed the secret. They offered him all sorts of inducements, but failed to convince him there was nothing to fear. Although they watched closely, he managed to slip away a night or two later. However, they had the necklace for their trouble.

Of course, the nuggets might have come in trade from the other side of the mountains. Not far north of George's present cabin was Stony Plains, an ancient trading centre between the eastern and western tribes. Here lumps of salt and sea shells were exchanged for buffalo hides. Along the mountains were other traditional market places where trading truces were observed. Through any of these the gold might have come, not as currency, but as an ornament or curiosity. Anyhow, the mystery remains unsolved.

Western Canada was merely a map to me still. I made this curious discovery when listening to George's yarns, which led me to compare my attitude with his own. All these places were just names to me; I needed a map to grasp their significance properly. George could neither read nor write except in the most rudimentary fashion. He needed no maps. His was not a book-nurtured mind. All western Canada was his backyard. He knew his way about it in just the same way that I had known the country round our farm when I was a boy. Mount Nessing had not been a name on a map to me, but a place where I had once seen a circus. So, for George, all this vast country was dotted with personal memories. For this reason, still nameless valleys, lakes, and peaks, often meant more to him than the towns and cities which had since sprung up everywhere. Once I grasped this fact I also realized why his presence turned this bleak wilderness into a home. From this point of view, it was Home, all of it.

George's cabin lay in a meadow near the fork where the

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Bighorn River joins the adolescent Saskatchewan. All around us here were snow-capped summits in an irregular circle. But, at sunrise, the uneven nature of the circle was not apparent; for, as the slanting rays set peak after peak afire, the effect was exactly one of finding oneself in the centre of a bowl of pure snow ringed with glowing gems, a mystic chalice proffered sacramentally for the refreshment of the vigilant and hardy.

To say that I would not have missed one of these sunrises for worlds would be hardly true. It takes a lot of determination to shed one's blankets and face those wintry dawns. Yet, I will say this much, on each of those many mornings when I had to rise in the dark to hunt up the ponies for one reason or another, however miserable I may have felt as the skies paled and the stars flickered out, once that glorious pageant of the kindling of the peaks had fairly started, I would not have traded that enchantment for a nest in the snugget of hole-ups. Here, each sunrise was a torch to rekindle the soul.

And then, having located the horses and chased them home over the squeaking snow-crust, what luxury it was to plunge down from those rare and remote heights of spiritual yearning into a frankly sensuous enjoyment of the fragrant pannikin of steaming coffee George would have ready for me.

Later, when returned within handy reach of libraries, memories of this experience caused me to read all I could find about the Grail, and this led me on to a study of sun worship. And, all the time, I found myself enjoying the supreme satisfaction of being able to say, 'I knew as much. When confronted with the fundamental symbol, my mind obeyed the same laws and followed the same path as the minds of these ancient observers'. Later still, reading of tropism, I became acquainted with the theory that the

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instinct to worship is merely photism, being every bit as much a physical law as that which draws the moth to the candle and the migrant bird to the lighthouse. I cannot see that this theory is far wrong either so far as it goes. But what the materialist has still to explain is why all progressive creatures should possess this photism, which in man has flowered into such noble imaginings. Anything less like a blind groping on the part of a meaningless product of a mechanical nature it would be hard to conceive. Where there is an instinct to adoration, it seems to me inevitable that there should be a great Need of Adoration somewhere, a Need which has set itself to develop, through heliotropism perhaps, that instinct in its creatures. In fact it does not seem too wild a guess to regard the fabled ambrosia, which sustains the gods as bread sustains man, as neither more nor less than the harvest of adoration they glean by every means in their power from all living creatures.

The news of our long-expected arrival spread swiftly, as news will, even in thinly populated valleys and forests. Soon, nearly every trapper in the district had visited us to buy what he needed. Note that I say *needed*, not *wanted*. They *wanted* all manner of expensive things, but George had far too long a head to risk killing his golden geese by stuffing them with luxuries.

He knew well he could sell any foolish toy he chose to exhibit, at any price he liked to ask. But George wanted no dealings with bankrupt and starving trappers. He made his Indians buy things that would help them to get more and yet more furs. Consequently our loads consisted only of food, blankets, accurate rifles, ammunition, shirts, steel gins, tobacco, and collapsible tin stoves, with an occasional mouth-organ, sack of beads, or box of chocolate slabs, as a special treat. There was no opposition to draw the trade away, so

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George was free to follow out his Spartan ideals for the welfare of his customers. And, as he himself priced both his goods and the furs paid over for them, the profit was not negligible.

On several occasions the Indians tried to pump me as to how his scale of prices compared with those of the outside market. Naturally it was no part of my duties to enlighten them, nor, indeed, did I know anything about the matter. Before going into the mountains I had reckoned myself the world's worst mathematician. I could never remember the price of anything two minutes after I had heard it.

Now, however, I was to discover that the Indians have an even greater claim to that distinction. The complicated tangle of debt and counter-debt, which arises from the custom of allowing them a year's credit, renders the keeping of their accounts a task for a financial genius. Sometimes the debts are of even longer standing but they are usually settled in the end. When a family comes in with its autumn catch it pays its last year's debts therewith. The spring catch goes in cash purchases if the outstanding debt has been completely settled.

The trader reimburses himself for the cost of freightage by tacking it on to the goods. The furs are priced according to the quotations at St. Louis and other centres. The vagaries of temporary fashion, of course, affect these prices. Another point to be considered is the local scarcity or abundance of any animal, also the occurrence of those periodic cycles when some creatures wax and wane in numbers, as with the lynx, for instance, which live mainly on rabbits. George told me the rabbits reach their maximum every seven years, and the lynx with them. Then the rabbits get some disease through overcrowding. They die off in hundreds of thousands, and the lynx soon experience a like decimation. The sickness

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abates and the process repeats itself. Naturally, when lynx are common, the Indian does not get so good a price, though the general market price may be the same. The trader gets his rake-off by such tricks, being actuated by that easy elasticity of view which is the middleman's long suit, not that the trader is the worst offender, there are others nearer the middle than he is. But this is where he passes the bite on to the Indian.

Of course it is easy to gibe at the middleman, yet God made him for a very evident purpose. Out of his ranks are drawn the politicians and business bosses who manage to jostle the world along fairly creditably in spite of the lethargy in these matters of the cultured and the stolidity of the helot. The merchant is the oil that greases the machine. Why then do some of us blaspheme? Why, indeed, if not because God also saw fit to provide a little grit to counteract the sickness. Everything acts as a brake on something else; the microbe on the rabbit, and so on the lynx; and the grit on the grease. This is what is known as the Balance of Trade and the Corner-stone of Economics.

Now that we have circumlocuted sufficiently to simulate the Indian business atmosphere, let us get on with the deal. Peter House, Jonathan Wild, Robin Redshirt, James Fisher, Nimrod Hunter, and Mary Two-Young-Men (all baptized and re-named by the missionaries), young people about my age, ride out of the pines and down the slope to the cabin. They hang their ponies on dead trees, or they leave them with reins dangling, and proceed, laughing and joking, not to enter the store, but to split up into three groups, each of which lights a little fire over which its members squat to warm their hands and smoke a pipe (probably *kinikinik*, or perhaps willow bark, their two native smokes, for they must be out of tobacco long since). Perhaps they produce and

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suck a relishing strip or two of dried meat warmed slightly in the fire. So far as taking any notice of the store is concerned, they might be picnickers in a park.

At last one hunter rises with a bored expression and, sauntering over to his saddle, detaches a bundle wrapped in buckskin and carries it over to the cabin. In this bundle are a few pelts. Other pelts, and his best, still hang on his saddle. Dismiss the idea that he has come to get rid of his furs! On the contrary, though he has come to make purchases, he intends to keep as many furs as he can. The pelts in his hand are the cash with which he intends to settle his outstanding debts, so that he can get into debt again. He has no intention of exhibiting any more furs than he can help, lest he should excite the cupidity of the trader. If he is lucky and crafty, he may be able to get all he wants on tick, and then his remaining furs can be made into garments or carried over the mountains to some other trader.

He enters smiling and gazes around inquisitively. The trader starts the ball and the Indian, so soon as his sylvan shyness is overcome, keeps it rolling quite creditably. He asks for news of old friends and gives news in return. He praises the trader's horses which he has passed on the flat. He praises the goods (naive proceeding that, where the white man is wont to deprecate) and then, quite casually, he asks if his white friend remembers the extent of his last season's debt. His white friend does, but he purposely makes it a little less than was agreed on; this, to inspire confidence by betraying a weak memory. There's nothing like making a simple man think you are simpler than he is, if you wish to open his heart and his pocket. Satisfied, the red man unwraps his bundle and brings out a lynx skin.

'*Mlsta-hay soo* (big lynx),' he announces. '*Tantatoo soonia?* (how much is it worth?)'

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In this sentence, though he is a Stoney, that is, a Rocky Mountain Assiniboine, he has used three languages, none his own. The first sentence is pure Cree. The second is a Cree corruption of *Tante tout* and of the Scottish word, 'siller' (silver).

The trader takes the pelt and examines it with a deprecating expression. *Ah, namoya! Absheesh soo!* is his verdict perhaps. 'Ah no, it's quite small!'

The Indian makes a gesture as one who should say, 'I'm in your hands. I've come honourably to liquidate a debt. I can't quibble'.

So the trader fixes a price and wipes that much off the account. Which sounds simple enough no doubt. But it isn't one little bit. For the Indian is no great shakes at book-keeping. He remembers the articles he bought last year, each as a separate item and so a separate debt. The half-sack of flour was worth so many muskrats. The blankets were so many silver fox skins and one ermine. He cannot visualize the total as a lump sum, but he intends to put up a bluff that he does, and that is why he usually insists on having every step of the calculation explained to him. He is like the Australian aboriginal shearer who never neglects to stand by when they tally the sheep in his pen. He may tick off each sheep, as it shoots out of the gate, with his index finger. But that is all bluff. He can't count further than five, and he has to rely on the honesty of the tallyman for the total of his (piece-work) wages.

So now the 'small-large' lynx having been fixed at a compromise price of eight dollars, the debt that is wiped off is not eight dollars in money to the Indian mind but some article that cost a 'small-large' lynx skin at last year's prices. If the offer of eight dollars is just a bit over what the Indian expected, then that trader can be reckoned a shrewd man and one who will keep his customers.

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So the pelts are produced one by one until all old debts are settled. Meanwhile the Indian's eyes have been roving round the new goods. He indicates articles, asks the price, and usually buys forthwith anything that takes his fancy. His business concluded, he rises, accepts a present of a plug of chewing tobacco or some beads, and goes out. Other trappers may have entered in the meanwhile, but they do not butt in. Each person's business is settled separately and, if there is no time for the others to shop, why there is always another day. The woman enjoy the chewing tobacco as much as the men. Thus Mary Two-Young-Men, a buxom wench with a shy but saucy air, appropriates Jonathan Wild's stick of tobacco as soon as he has received it, bites off a healthy quid with her strong white teeth and returns the plug to the young man, who passes it round to the others. Their manners are perfect, and so, by the way, are those of the Australian aboriginals, at least of those individuals I have had anything to do with. Whether white schooling has had anything to do with this, I am not in a position to say, but from what I have read, I gather it has not.

The Indians are socialists in everything. That is why there are rarely any rich men among them. The hungry must be fed by the fortunate, and, of course, there are bound to be a few drones who take advantage of this system. Even such rare luxuries as tea, flour, sugar, and tobacco are shared. The tea, by the way, serves two purposes. They drink the brew and eat the leaves, as vegetables, spread on meat.

A white who takes an Indian wife is inevitably doomed to poverty if he does not take her right away from her people. His goods are their goods henceforth unless he can think up some lie or taboo to protect them. The Indians will probably detect the lie, but they will respect the code, if not the liar.

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When a chief calls to trade, even more time is wasted. There are ceremonial speeches, as between neighbouring potentates in medieval Europe. Presents are made on both sides, and the chief may show his displeasure, if he thinks the trader has been mean, by instructing his people to trade elsewhere. This present-giving system was responsible for a good few embarrassing situations in the old days. By Indian etiquette it was sufficient for a guest to praise any article (even a horse or a woman) for his host to present it to him forthwith. (Here we see the idea behind the customer's praising of goods.) Considerable tact was required for a white man to judge just what to accept or refuse. In any case, he was sure that some day the Indian would return the visit, and even things up by praising his belongings right and left. I believe that, with some peoples, to praise anything is to put the evil eye on it, so that it will be of no further use to its possessor. But I am not sure of the connection here.

Old John Wesley, the head chief of all the Stonies, lived up here, away from the reservation at Morley. He had a cabin some fifteen miles farther up the river. He was an imposing man, six feet one and straight as an arrow in spite of his snow-white hair. His strong face was wrinkled as a river delta seen from the air and, though that face was the face of eighty winters, his body was all smooth and golden like that of a young man, as I noted one day when he slipped off his blanket to try on a shirt. This hooded blanket-coat or *capote*, and the blanket leggings, reaching to the thighs, where they are fastened to the gee string, are just about all an Indian wears even in the coolest weather. Head scarf and moccasins with no socks inside them, a breech-clout and cartridge belt with a huge knife sheath complete his costume. The *capotes* are made, beaded, belled and ornamented, generally by the squaws. They use Hudson Bay

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blankets, than which there are no finer in the world. Some trappers also wear fox-skin hats with the tail left on as a tassel, or wolf or bear masks made into caps such as were not unknown to our own ancestors. The men paint up for a ceremonial dance, but the symbolism of paint is already on the way to being forgotten. Where there is no fighting there is no longer any need for distinguishing marks, nor any value in decorations.

Some of the women use paint as a daily titification; and very fetching it can be, too, especially one with a golden, buttercup-pollen effect dusted round the large dark eyes. Unlike some of their white sisters they don't overdo it. Restraint is remarkable in all their habits.

I almost fell in love with a niece of the chief's, named Mary Wesley. She was about sixteen, very graceful and shy. She would never open her mouth, and would look quickly away if she saw me staring at her. I began to think she did not like me. Then, one day I was sure of it. I had gone down the river with a couple of ponies to get some coal from an outcrop in the bank. On my return, rounding a bend made by a wooded island, I ran slap into Mary Wesley all on her own. She gave me one startled glance, like a deer. Then she swung round in her tracks and raced as hard as she could pelt for the wooded island, into which she disappeared and did not come out again.

Considerably mortified, I told George when I got back. He seemed much amused.

'Am I so god-damn ugly, then?' I asked him.

George laughed all the more.

'You're a fine, gallant fellow!' he said at last.

I asked him what he meant.

'She meant you to follow her,' he explained. 'They always do that when they meet a man they're set on. It's their way.'

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Later George said, 'It's just as well you didn't start anything with that Mary Wesley; unless you mean to go on with it. It might ruin my trade. Old Chief John would have something to say.'

I thought so too. I knew I did not really want Mary Wesley.

And, so far as her uncle was concerned, when meeting him for the first time, I had experienced what must always be a queer sensation for a white man. I felt inferior to this ancient Indian. He had a quiet dignity that, whilst acknowledging my status as a white, yet suggested quite plainly though unobtrusively an awareness of my youth and inexperience. In fact, he was a ruler in his own right, and this was apparent to whites and Indians alike. The chief's speech of welcome had been translated by an interpreter, a young man from the mission schools. The main theme was a reiteration of the fact that John Wesley had kept his tribe out of the Red River Rising because of his love for the whites, and had therefore been specially thanked by a representative from the Great Mother (Queen Victoria). He then enlarged on his friendship for the whites in general and for George in particular. He said that his people trusted George and knew his tongue was not double. He then started to praise the goods and the present-giving began.

The Stonies, or Stoney Crees (Eesenapots, in Cree, Suksiseoketuks, in Blackfoot, both meaning Rock Men) are not Crees at all. They are an offshoot of the Sioux (Assiniboines). George told me they separated from the main tribe over some trivial quarrel (just as the Apaches separated from their parent tribe, the Canadian Chippewyans, over a dog-fight).

They call themselves *Nakotas*, which means *Friends*, and,

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like the Crows in Montana, they most certainly have been good friends to the white man, thanks principally to the wisdom of John Wesley, endorsed undoubtedly by those mysterious dream messages by which the Indians are guided. They were fairly friendly, too, with their neighbours; yet, in the old days, no tribe could afford to let the martial spirit flicker out, so they kept it alive, just as we did during the stagnation of trench warfare, by conducting periodic raids, and conducting them under certain rules which, though varying slightly from tribe to tribe, formed a general, if ferocious, code of chivalry.

Many of the old men among these trappers had been on the warpath in their youth, raiding down into the Flathead and Kootenay countries and even farther, there to collect wealth, in the shape of ponies, and honour, in the form of scalps and coups, thus proving themselves fit to marry and contribute to the fighting strain of the tribe. That strain, being later denied freedom to fight by Canadian law, sought, in its turn, to prove its hardihood by perpetuating the Sundance ceremony, where youthful braves sought to jerk themselves free from rawhide thongs passed through incisions in their breast muscles, and sometimes endured the torture for the round of the sun without being able to free themselves and without a groan, till at last they were hitched to a horse and literally yanked free from their own lacerated muscles. This, too, was eventually forbidden by law, and now the unfit are just as welcome to marry among these people as among the whites. Such stern discipline was apparently necessary to produce the ideal Redskin character. Once it was removed, the Indian became like a ship without a rudder. Centuries of intensive selection fell to pieces like a house of cards. Respect for his own gods went, and with it much of his self respect. Yet there is still a good sprinkling

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of the ancient virtues, though they are chiefly confined to the elders, reared under the old harsh system.

Lo, the poor Indian! What is he to make of the bewildering contradictions of the white races! whose missionaries strive to spread doctrines which are openly scoffed at by the traders, fighters and pioneers? Naturally, he argues, warriors should be in complete accord with their medicine-men, or else there must be something radically wrong. For what is the use of a horse with a head at either end? How is it going to travel? Like a wise man, the Indian adheres in his heart to his own Great Spirit, though he may accept baptism just as the Druids of Britain accepted Christianity but remained Druids, finding, in fact, very little to choose between the two faiths after all, but preferring the more ancient. Though a few of the younger men may blaspheme when in the presence of irreligious whites, and a few others may sing hymns when with the missionaries, the Indian on the whole keeps remarkably quiet on the subject of religion, and his mouth is a sober mouth. Not that he does not appreciate the self-sacrifice of the missionary. He appreciates all self-sacrifice. It is part of his code. Still, he argues, in a hungry, snowbound wilderness (such as his country has become since the game has been thinned down), other men also make prodigious sacrifice of self on occasion and for more concrete ends. The mounted policeman makes heroic journeys both to save life and to arrest delinquents. The prospector stays uncowed by circumstance at the side of his sick mate. What more can even a missionary do in the practical line? And, on his own confession, the missionary cannot prophecy nor invoke spirits.

And, to revert to the Indian's ideas on blasphemy — for they are instructive — he uses the white man's obscenity on rare occasions. But his most virulent expressions have no

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equivalent in English. The worst insult, in Cree for instance, is *kokooschooe*, which means pig's testicles. Not exactly a forcible epithet from our point of view. Yet our deadly insult, *bastard*, is just as grotesque and meaningless to Indian minds. The insult implied to the mother is no insult. An *ishquao*! Do not warriors lend their spare wives to friends who come to stay as guests? And how can a woman help having children occasionally by some guest? The case is dismissed, Mr. Whiteman, as untenable in a presumably logical world. This prying into the bend sinister is an idle task for idle minds. For the Indian's socialism leads him to individualism. Each brave has to earn his own name by some daring or strenuous exploit, and, if he fails, ignominy descends on him in the form of some such sobriquet as 'Young Man Afraid of His Horses' or 'Crazy Dog'. Even the son of a great chief has to earn his own name. The missionary christenings have upset this custom on the surface only. The old ideas persist.

Some of the young men were louts who had been spoilt in one way or another, but there were many exceptions. Sam Cecil, or 'Tham Theethil' as he called himself, was, for instance, a really beautiful youth with a face like a Norman knight and a softly modulated voice. His languid, lisping enunciation was apparently natural, and he spoke very good English indeed. He was, however, consumptive. His wife looked much older than himself, but probably was not. She had two half-breed children running with her as well as two full-bloods. These Stonies seemed particularly kind to their children.

Sam Cecil would also appear to have been kind to animals; at least, so my first meeting with him suggested, the memory of which incident will always remain among my garland of smaller idylls. I was probing the ice with a spear, to find a

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hole where I might fill my bucket, when I noticed a tall Indian, dressed in bright colours, coming across the ice from the other bank. The relief afforded by colour in that glaring monotony of white has to be experienced to be appreciated. At first I thought he was alone. Then I noticed he kept stopping, to turn at last and scoop up a tiny white bundle which I had not noticed before. When he arrived within a few yards from me, I saw it was a small snow-white puppy with blue eyes. Halting to speak, he set the puppy down on the ice, when it immediately began to whine and dance, lifting first one foot and then the other, evidently discomfited by the bite of the cold beneath its tiny pink pads. Laughing his soft, fluttering laugh, Sam lifted the puppy again into his arms, whereupon the ludicrous creature nipped his finger and shook it. Whereat, of course, we laughed all the more, which sent the puppy frantic with rage. I thought of Hiawatha's 'Hark you, bear, you are a coward!' and of a note appended thereto in my copy. 'Did you see how ashamed he looked?' the annotator quoted one trapper as saying of a wounded bear. Embarrassment in an animal is the funniest thing in the world. They feel it so keenly and take no steps to disguise it.

George decided to give a *potlatch*, or feast, on Christmas Day. Actually we gave it on New Year's Day, by a slight mistake which caused nobody any inconvenience. Or had George made the blunder deliberately in order to give outlying families time to get in? George was so cunning a strategist I could quite imagine him adopting this or any other ruse and not saying a word even to myself, his assistant.

A *potlatch*, by the way, means a gift in the Chinook language, which is the trade tongue of the western slopes of the mountains, just as Cree is that of the eastern slopes and the plains. So the word comes to mean a banquet. Literally,

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George's feast was *cultus potlatch* (a bad gift . . . to the giver) because he expected nothing in return. I mention this because it shows how the Indian mind works concerning gifts: also it illustrates the elasticity of words in a trade language. *Cultus* does its fair share of work for it means bad, weak, wicked, rotten, unpropitious, useless, and so anything that is *given away free*. The word thus rounds the circle meaning bad, either to giver or receiver as the speaker chooses.

We had a Christmas tree for the children on New Year's night and, after dark, the Indians held a dance, seated in two rows on a level piece of ground, men on one side, women on the other, like a white man's barn dance. They built a huge fire at each end. The orchestra was a drum, a mouth organ, two strips of sleigh-bells, and the human voice. They sang one tune very like the 'Dance of Salome with the Head', which some of them may have picked up from a gramophone record somewhere. The men did all the dancing. The women giggled and sat tight whenever any young bucks leapt upon them and tried to drag them to their feet. Silas Abraham, a rather weak-witted old boy, according to George who had once employed him as a packer, was certainly a good mime. He amused the children by giving various realistic animal imitations, especially one of a hungry dog sniffing around the cooking pots and leaping away with a heart-rending yelp every time it collected a well-aimed kick. Like that other 'happy' person, Mr. Dick in *David Copperfield*, Silas was always at home with the children.

Sam Cecil made a speech in which he accorded me the special honour of claiming me as his cousin, and everyone laughed, as uproariously as an Indian can manage, over this adoption. One favourite amusement of the young men was to take running leaps through the roaring fires, which were built of logs piled high, for there were lots of dry timber on

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the flat, ghost pines that had died standing up and needed only a slight push to bring them crashing down.

We had soon quite a respectable pile of pelts, with which we augmented our bedding till, like oriental kings, we reclined on wealth and luxury in epitome. Yet, although I often roamed the neighbouring valleys with a rifle, I saw nothing beyond the tracks of the raw material; so I had come to handle furs almost without a thought to their feral origin.

Then, one day, I came on a live lynx in a trap, and came on it so suddenly that none of the macabre possibilities of the adventure escaped me, for my first confused impression was that the creature was free and crouched to spring. I was paralysed with fear. Those hellish eyes blazed from their mask in venomous fury, haunting my dreams for many a night, and I accepted the low, rasping, blood-freezing snarl as all mine, till my heart literally sobbed with relief as I caught sight of the chain. Not daring to club him to death in order to save expense, Indian fashion, I finished that fellow with a bullet between the eyes and then prodded him with the longest branch I could find in order to make sure he was dead. Then I hung the carcass in a forked tree and went home, entirely cured of any desire for further hunting that day. The owner of the trap, my friend Joshua Twin, read the signs as easily as a civilized man would read a newspaper paragraph. A day or two later he called with the pelt for trade and a joint of meat as a present. He appreciated the joke hugely, but was too polite to offer audible comment. The meat tasted like veal, I thought.

Another time I came on a bear, a small black fellow, very gaunt and evidently just woken from his winter sleep. He spotted me at the same time, gave one whoosh of surprise, swung round and scuttled away for his life. Now I was always coming on bears. Once my spell of blindness had

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been broken, I encountered several animals during my walks and was even accorded one apparition from the wild, at home in the cabin. I was alone, too, for George was away on a trip to the Little Brazeau mine, and I really thought my visitor was the devil himself, come to collect me, horns and all.

The door was shut and the solitary window was not made to open. We had got the roof on by that time and had plugged the chinks, so that all was snug inside until the fire went out.

Just before dawn, I woke shivering, not with cold, but with the consciousness that something was looking at me. Cautiously working my head out of the blankets, I rolled my eyes around till they focused on the window, where I at once noticed, with a leap of the heart, that the starlight, usually reflected from the snow, was obscured by some dark object a little bigger than a man's head. The upper portion terminated in two peaked horns and, beneath them, my gaze was held by two balefully blazing pools of green light. Scared? I never had a worse fright at any time in my life. I let out one ear-splitting screech and sprang right off my tail straight at Old Cloutie, for whoever else could it be? This entirely automatic display of boldness justified itself beyond my wildest hopes. The horned terror dropped to the ground and fled precipitately into the night. I just saw a large blur of grey streak over the wan starlit snow into the nearest shadows. An examination of the tracks soon after dawn revealed no cloven hoofs however, merely a timber-wolf's pads. The pointed horns had been its pricked ears.

I met one other timber-wolf, by daylight this time. These wolves, like dogs, fall under the spell of the human whistle. They don't come to call, of course, but they sit still to listen and often pay for their curiosity with their lives. (No — not

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often, I should say sometimes, for nowadays one does not often get close enough to hold them by whistling, so keen has competition become even in the trapping trade.)

George and I had a team out when we drove on to this fellow, squatted on his haunches atop of a bank watching us. George pulled up the horses and started to whistle. The wolf sat still with his tongue out, for all the world like a large collie dog. If I had happened to be the one driving, and George had had the rifle handy, that wolf would have died. However, as it was the tenderfoot who had the gun, he survived. The lever of my rifle had worked partly open. I tried to close it and failed. It was jammed with frozen snow. I yanked and yanked and eventually managed somehow to work up another shell from the magazine and this shell immediately jammed obliquely behind the one already in the breach. All this time George was patiently whistling and the wolf was enjoying the concert without a trace of alarm. When I dropped my rifle to hunt for George's, however, Mr. Wolf concluded it was time to slip behind the bank and lope away. So a fine grey pelt was lost to the furriers.

George did not reproach me. He treated every mishap as a huge joke, welcome material for sly future allusions. I did not reproach myself either, so the sting of those allusions was considerably blunted. It is a great compensation at times to be a creature of mixed ethics. You score either way. If I had bagged that wolf I should have rejoiced at my coup. Losing him, I still rejoiced in that I had not taken a life. But, of course, I didn't tell George that. So long as I was dependent on him for food and occasional wages, my views on the sphere for wild animals in the scheme of things had to tally with his. They were merely so much fur crop to George. To the tenderfoot, as to the Indians, they were fellow beings, in the same class with horses and dogs.

CHAPTER VIII

STUDIES IN SCAPEGOATS

FEBRUARY is the lean month in an Arctic clime; and I may safely call all central Canada an Arctic country on the assurance of Steffansen who states that, even as far south as the Dakotas, there is practically no difference between the winter conditions and those obtaining above the Circle. February is the month when the offensive launched by the Ice King has reached its maximum severity, and the resistance of all living things has reached exhaustion point, when the blood in the limb has attained approximately the glacial state of the sap in the bough, when the partridge burrows into the snowdrift in envious imitation of the hibernating bear, and when beasts walk gauntly under the pitiless stars, especially herbivorous creatures who are so weak now that they fall an easy prey to the hunter. The latter gets little nourishment, however, from their wasted carcasses. In February I have caught rabbits with my hands and in such poor condition that the tender skin has broken like tissue paper under my clutch.

Under these conditions, I was surprised to discover that all ducks do not migrate south. Wherever it is possible to win a living (that is, wherever an up-bubbling spring in a river discourages the formation of ice, so providing a small pool of open water) there will be found at least one duck or hell-diver and sometimes a pair. They spend most of the time in the warmest place they can find — under water. Why they don't freeze solid when they waddle out on to the ice for an occasional stroll is a mystery.

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George sent me off after Christmas to pick up some stores he had cached forty miles away. He said I would find Enid's a comfortable place to camp. What was Enid's? Oh, just a deserted tie-cutters' camp. But why was it called Enid's? After some woman or perhaps a mare, George surmised, but what did it matter?

This was deplorable ignorance on the part of one who had named several local features himself. Hadn't Glove Creek been christened by George after a derelict buckskin mitten he had found on its banks, and did not the meadows around his cabin bear his own name on the latest survey maps made two years ago? All the same I had to depart with my curiosity unsatisfied.

I found the camp all right. After supper, by the light of the stable lantern I carried, I examined some pencilled inscriptions on the smooth side of the slab door. Enid's was evidently a handy camp for travellers of many nationalities, and these messages had been left at sundry times for the eyes of late-comers.

'To Jake Woods', read one. 'Gone to Sunwapta, Steve.' Another was written in Canadian French, and yet another in the shorthand script invented by the missionaries for the use of the Stonies. Then to my surprise I came across a very roughly scrawled tag in what looked like Latin, and beneath it, sprawled across a knot of wood, what looked at first like a signature. With difficulty I spelt out the letters, AENEID; and suddenly a light dawned. But who on earth was the scholar-gipsy whose nickname had stuck to this camp?

When George went down with his furs we camped one night at a railroad construction camp, on the line then under construction between Rocky Mountain House and the Little Brazeau mines. Learning there was a job going, I took it. In fact, I took two jobs in one, bull-cook in the daytime, and

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night watchman at night. I drew double pay and lost no sleep. A watchman was necessary because the freighters left their loaded sleighs a mile away from the camp, down on the river. I had a tent down there in which I was free to sleep so long as the sleighs were effectively guarded. Where you get a string of camps there are bound to be a few rogues. I was there to deter sneak-thieving. A *bull-cook* is a hewer of wood and drawer of water to the cook, whose indoor offside is the cookee. The latter scullerymaids the dishes and flunkies the men at their meals. Occasionally there would be no sleighs to watch. I then slept in the big log bunkhouse. That is, I tried to sleep, for there was always an all-night card party until about two in the morning, and always the game would end in a rough-house. Also I found the bunks lousy.

We had all kinds of weird visitors at that camp. A parson arrived one Sunday and preached at one end of the big bunkhouse whilst the perpetual card-playing went on at the other end. Some of us would stroll from one source of entertainment to the other. The cards claimed the larger audience though. Then we had Indian visitors with furs and meat to trade. Politicians came up to ingratiate themselves with the men, and professional gamblers to clean out their pockets. Two nigger whores came up from Rocky Mountain House, where they had been working for 'Lil' at her red light hostel. A barber travelled with them and also did a flourishing trade. They had a team of light horses and a bob-sleigh, travelling in a genteel manner like the politicians.

The mounted police also visited us. They came to take away an Italian youth who murdered a large Irishman right before our eyes. The trouble began when the Italian produced a deringer pistol and shot and wounded a woodpecker. He did not wring the bird's neck, but flung it in the air and

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stood entranced to watch its antics as it tumbled to earth flapping its unbroken wing. His experiment in aeronautics was suddenly interrupted by the Irishman, who promptly clouted him on the chin and then stooped to put the bird out of its misery. This gave the insulted youth a chance to take the deringer from his bunk and shoot his assailant in the back and through the heart. The murderer went down under a concerted rush. After he had been searched for weapons and cartridges he was freed again and sat staring sullenly at the stove till the 'pull' arrived. The dead Irishman was taken to a hut occupied by the hospital orderly. This orderly was the travelling doctor's resident assistant. He was a cockney and a voracious reader. He lent me *The Rosary*, and I read it down at my tent on the river. Like songs, books have a knack of recalling place and circumstance. *The Rosary* will always bring back to me that dead Patlander on the stretcher in the orderly's hut.

With the break-up of the ice I left the Mountains and went to Edmonton, where I took a room with a German family, the head of which worked in a brewery. He was a repulsive person. He ate highly-spiced *délicatessen* which were denied to the rest of the family. Father always had his special dish, with the children looking greedily on. He used to go fishing, and would bring his catch back alive, when he would put them in a washtub in the back yard to amuse himself every little while by tipping out the water and watching them flounder and gasp till they were nearly dead; then he would wet them again. If ever a man deserved to die of consumption or gas poisoning, that man did. One day, when drunk, he accidentally hanged a cow by tying it up with a slipknot. Everything seemed to run to choking with him. After the War, having been gassed myself, I remembered this man and wondered if, in some former existence, I had been some-

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thing like him. I have never really been able to believe in individual transmigration or reincarnation but, when in prolonged physical distress, one's view are liable to become grotesque.

Finally, he frightened a girl who came to see me by leering at her through the window as she approached, thus causing a misunderstanding, first with the girl and then with my landlady, who loyally took her husband's part, even against her own family on occasion.

That was the last straw. I changed my digs, my next choice being governed by the fact that the house had an attractive garden. My landlord here was an Englishman who had been footman to a lord. He was a rabid radical but retained his veneration for the aristocracy as individuals, which led him into many grotesque arguments with his fellow members of the I.W.W. His wife was a hard-working, masculine type of Frenchwoman, and the house and any money they possessed had come to him with her. They quarrelled frequently and badly. One morning she came up to my room with a cup of tea and showed me a horrible black eye.

'See what 'e 'as done to me this morning, that *sale bête*!'

Soon after she had gone down again, I heard a devil of a racket. I thought he was beating her up. As I descended, the noise abated and a door banged. I expected to find her half murdered at least. Instead I found my footman looking rather crestfallen.

'Look what that bitch did to me last night,' he growled, pulling up his shirt and exposing a four-inch knife slash across his ribs. 'This morning,' he added, 'just after she'd taken you your tea she started in on me with a broom handle. I've locked her in the bedroom. I'll have to get the breakfasts myself.'

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When I came in to lunch I found them closely embraced in an armchair. I stayed with these people several months, and always when in the throes of a tiff they would come to me separately full of abuse for each other and pity for themselves. But they fed me well and never overcharged me, which was worth occasional embarrassments, I thought.

My first job in Edmonton had been in a steam laundry. They raised my wages each week, and I was doing well when I spoilt it all by taking a day off without permission. I had met the photographer who had worked with me in the Calgary studio, and he had hinted that he might get me included in a party which was going up to the Great Slave Lake to take cinema films of wild life. But his employer was not impressed with me. Worse still, I had put myself in the position of the dog in the fable. I had lost both the real and the phantom job. During my subsequent three weeks out of work, I subsisted on one meal a day, filling my pocket with bread thereat, in the manner of the long man at Innisfail.

One day I saw a placard advertising a free chicken dinner. All one had to do was to turn up at a certain mission hall in time to hear an address by a bishop. I went. The bishop was a tall, handsome negro, chocolate to the bone, bearded, grave and dignified. The address was lengthy, and there seemed to be quite an unnecessary number of hymns before the chicken arrived. But when it came there was plenty of it and the plate piled high with vegetables too. Singing hymns for one's supper is a whole lot easier on the hands than bucking wood for a Salvation Army meal. Unfortunately, such miracles occur only rarely — once in a lifetime perhaps.

Then I received a registered letter from George, who had managed to sell a rifle I had left with him. It was written by

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Joe, and it contained eight dollars. I was thus able to dine again at a cheap and decidedly Bohemian restaurant in the vicinity of the laundry. The Chinese waiter was a cheery lad who, having dwelt several years in the Mountains, took to greeting me in Chinook. '*Skla-how-yah?*' he would yell at sight, which expression has a deal more personal warmth in it than the white man's curt 'Howdo?' And the correct reply, '*Skla-how-yah-siks?*' ('How's yourself?') is in keeping. Some day I am going to compile a dictionary. It will give the most appropriate word for each and everything, and it will be culled from every language under the sun. It will be a poets' Volapük.

Some of the liveliest of the laundry girls used this restaurant which had little partitions (I almost said, cubicles) for private parties. When things got hectic in any division, the neighbours would climb on their tables and spy over the top to share the fun.

To this hilarious restaurant came sometimes (whenever he could afford it, in fact) a long, lean, dour young Scotsman. One day he turned up looking actually cheerful, and told me he had not only got a job to start to-morrow but he thought I could get one, too, if I didn't object to a policeman's uniform. Well, I did object, but not to that extent. So, when I discovered I would not be expected to parade my blue uniform in the streets, but merely between those stone walls (in this case, a wooden fence) which do not a prison make, so far as the jailer is concerned, I let him take me to the warden of the penitentiary. Thus, after a doctor's examination, at which I was required to convince the examiner I had no diseases and could read and write, I became a 'guard' on probation. Thirty-five dollars a month, meals in the prison at ten cents each, unlimited revolver practice without having to pay for shells, and the prospect of two free suits of

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uniform a year and free boots and cobbling as soon as I passed out of the probationer stage; all this looked very good to me. Also I could sleep in the prison, if I liked, or continue to board in the town. I was in clover.

I put in eleven months at that penitentiary and, after the first sickening sensation of seeing men in cages had worn thin, I enjoyed it well enough. Life was stripping me of one prejudice after another and, though I was becoming outwardly tougher in the process, inwardly I was learning how to extend my sympathy to include types of men I would have shrunk from a few years earlier. So, with the convicts.

My first impression of the prison was one of a menagerie. There was a pungent, furtive, animal atmosphere, not entirely ascribable to the slop buckets in the cells. They were all long-time men, two years and over, and many were *habitués* of such institutions, 'permanent boarders at the King's', to use their own phrase.

There was very little outward sign of the inward grace of penitence. Convicts do not wear their feelings on their sleeves and, when they do, you can bet there's a catch somewhere. The men were of all nationalities, mostly white, with a good sprinkling of negroes and a few Indians, Chinamen, Japs, and nondescript castes of all colours. The man I liked best was a half-breed youth, a Scots Cree, in for horse-stealing, which, under many circumstances, can hardly be called a crime. It is more like a risky gamble. This youth was a handsome, cheery lad, always studying other Indian languages than his own, which he naturally did not have to study. He got dictionaries from the chaplain, and his regulation slate was always covered with his exercises in translation. He was a religious boy, and looked like heading towards a job as a lay preacher.

'Lady Jane', another boy, was as melancholy as the Scot

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was cheery. He was English, of the superior clerk type, scrawny, nervous and girlish, hence his nickname. Everyone believed him innocent. He had enjoyed only one month of liberty in Canada, for he had hardly arrived before his trouble overtook him. Sharing his room at the hotel with another man, with whom he had become fairly friendly on a short acquaintance, Jane naturally felt no suspicion when this man asked him one day to go to the post office and get his mail. Jane went, opened the box with the key his room mate had given him, and was seized by waiting detectives. His friend had been robbing the mail for a long time, usually employing cat's-paws. When the police, on hearing Jane's explanation, called at the hotel, the bird, with the uncanny clairvoyance of the criminal, had sensed something in the wind and flown. Probably he had been wide-awake enough to 'see them coming'. Anyway, in default of a substitute, Jane went up for a stretch at the King's. Just a small matter of changing hotels, as his fellow convicts pointed out to him. But Jane didn't see it that way. He reckoned his life was ruined, and possibly he knew more about it than they did.

Among the Indians was the son of a Blood chief. When drunk, he had murdered a mounted policeman. The trader who supplied the firewater got only ten years, but the Indian youth got a natural-life sentence, which seems a bit of a maladjustment somehow; yet it is difficult to see how the situation could have been handled otherwise, once the damage had been done. The youth had not yet had time to realize what a natural-life sentence means. He boasted to me that his father was rich enough to get him out, somehow, before long.

One Mexican, whose head, when shaven, quite definitely suggested the head of a serpent, told us frankly, when about to leave at the end of his sentence, that his one object in life was to kill the man who had squealed on him. That, of

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course, was no business of ours, and we didn't believe him anyway. However, he had been free only about six weeks when he figured in big type in the papers, having realized his ambition. As a final demonstration of defiance, he had gone to earth in a horizontal mine shaft, near Butte, Montana, I believe. Anyway, wherever it was, the citizens will remember him, for he managed to kill several of the posse before they smoked him out and shot him dead. What an epic allowance of berserk violence that insignificant-seeming, snaky, chinless, foreheadless countenance must have masked.

Many of the men were skilled at plaiting lariats, bridles, and watch chains from horsehair or rawhide, a forbidden occupation, for ropes of any sort were taboo, along with tools of all kinds, smoking tobacco, and matches. Tools and ropes must be left in the workshops. Chewing tobacco was allowed to the sanitary men only, as a slight reward for performing their unsavoury job. Smoking tobacco and sugar were luxuries permitted only in the hospital ward. Otherwise, the boarders at the King's fared quite well on meat, garden produce, and as much dry (but new) bread as they cared to eat. Plain but wholesome fare which left a man hankering for ham and eggs, no doubt, but, so far as the Indians were concerned, represented more regular rations than they got outside. Also there were very few inmates who had not a piece of tobacco and a flint, steel and tinder (made of charred rags and called 'punk') stored away somewhere. A thin stream of smoke would trickle from a cell. The guard on duty, if he thought the inspecting patrol anywhere handy, would promptly bear down on the offender, but would rarely obtain any more substantial evidence than the smell. The convicts also showed extraordinary cunning in hiding their horsehair and rawhide. The bridles and lariats were for sale to the guards. That was why tobacco got into the

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prison, and fresh supplies of horsehair. Surprise searches were ordered every now and then. It was astonishing what a collection of flints and steels and home-made tools would be collected, and yet we knew there were probably as many left undetected.

We had one ingenious and educated man, a university graduate, with a perverted facility in mechanics and applied chemistry. He was an expert forger of postal notes, and was also no mean locksmith. He had escaped a dozen times and had made twice as many unsuccessful attempts. Once free, he took few precautions, and was soon caught again. He got away once while I was there, but they had him back in six weeks. Four escaped together one night, having sawed through all the necessary bars and covered the cuts with coats of paint some time previously, when there was an official 'paint' on. Our ingenious prodigy was one of them. He was in the end cell from which he could reach and unlock the Samson bar, which runs the length of the whole range of cells as an extra precaution. He was the only one of the four to be recaptured. One was in for murdering his own brother in a lover's quarrel of some sort. It would surprise me to learn that he had ever been retaken alive. There was a fire in his face.

The ingenious one had bad luck twice more while I was there. On one occasion he scaled an air shaft, in a wing under construction, and lurked on the roof till dusk. This wing ran close to the fence, which he managed to get over in the dusk without being seen, though the alarm had sounded. Unfortunately for him, he dropped almost into a mounted police buggy which was arriving with another prisoner.

Yet again he failed by a mere chance. There was a trusty who drove a tip-cart with rubbish from the prison yard to the farm outside. The guard on the gate had orders to let

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him out whenever necessary. One day this guard, who was just reclosing the gate, heard a racket and, turning, he saw the pin had come out of the tip-cart and the rubbish had shot itself out right before the gate. Amid the rubbish was our persistent one. The trusty swore he didn't know he had a passenger, but somehow I think he had worked his head all right and arranged things so that neither the authorities nor his fellows should be able to blame him. After that the guard on the gate was provided with a long harpoon with which to probe all loads.

There were two long, lean, raw-boned men, both well over six feet. They were old mates in many a questionable venture, having met on the Klondyke in '98, and from there proceeded in time to Kamschatka, where they got into trouble with the Russian police for trading in furs without a licence, as far as I can remember. Then the Japs nabbed them for seal-poaching. One of these men was a Scot, the other a Scandinavian, spawn of Vikings both. The Scandinavian was now in for some sort of embezzlement connected with gold-mining, whilst the Scot was up for manslaughter and carrying a concealed weapon. He had been set upon by a crowd of Italians in a camp poker game in which he had been having more than his fair share of the luck. After being clouted on the head with an axe, he got rough in his turn and killed two of his assailants. Known to the police as a stormy petrel, he was sent up as a little reminder that the brave days of border forays are reckoned by modern society as outmoded. His lawyers, however, got him out after eighteen months.

But our ace, whom I will call here Johnny Walker, was the hero of a hundred cattle-lifting exploits. George Locke had known Johnny, who had stayed at his cabin one night, on his way (so he said) to look for grazing land on the Upper Brazeau. Next day, two young men turned up at the cabin.

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They asked if Walker had preceded them and told George they were cowboys in his employ. A couple of days later the party returned. They slept again at the cabin and Johnny and one of the young men shared blankets, being further united by a pair of steel bracelets. The mounted police use their own bodies as hitching posts to which to tether their quarry at nights.

Johnny escaped through one of the air shafts in the prison coal-mine and got clear away. Unlike our postal note expert, he stayed away.

There are clowns everywhere, even in prison. We had a mouthy Texan, not too fond of soap and water either. He used to sing a little south-western catch which I have since recognized as the model from which the words of 'Ragtime Cowboy Joe' seem to have been taken. At least, he croaked and howled a confection which went like this:

'I'm tough!

I'm one of the real, original, rootin', tootin' sons of
bitches from Bitter Creek.

The higher up the creek you goes,
The tougher'n bitterer we grows,
An' I live in the last shack.

'Say, I'm tough!

My dad he wuz a mount'n goat,
My dam a grizzly b'ar.
I wuz dropped on a bed o' cactus
An' I cut my teeth on a prickly p'ar.
You kin keep your ham an' aigs.
Gimme a rattler sandwich or a
*Vinagron-e*¹ with a hundred laigs . . .
I'm that tough!

¹ A *vinagron-e* is a centipede.

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'I kin outride, outshoot, outrun, outfight, outlie,
Any son of a bitch in thisyer jail.
An' I'd ruther be safe inside than
Runnin' around on bail.
I'm that tough!'

He was a mean sort of a creature in reality, more like a cross between a skunk and a goat than what he claimed to be.

Then there was Fritz, a cheery thug with a face like a battered sledge-hammer. He and some pals had invited a Swede prospector to a little card party in Fritz's room. The Swede had been foolish enough to win steadily and to expect to get away with it. When he had cleaned them all out, Fritz told me, something just had to be done. So Fritz stepped softly behind his guest and smoothed his crown with a 'meal-ticket', which is a short length of lead piping, good for the price of a meal any day in skilful hands.

Through the malignity of fate, the Swede had recognized him in the street some little time later, so here he was. Fritz was always up to some practical joke or other, preferably something with a little blood-letting attached. He was a born criminal or, at any rate, manufactured with very little alteration, a cheerful, absolutely self-centred amoral ape-man, determined to have his share of whatever was going, even in jail. One day, when I had him out with the farm gang, he used his hay-prong as a javelin and neatly speared a rooster a few yards away. We didn't keep fowls. It was a stranger, so I told him he could keep it so long as he didn't get caught with it and get me into trouble. He said, 'Don't worry!' Next day I strolled over to his cell at dinner time. He was looking preternaturally innocent till he recognized me, then he grinned and produced a drumstick from under the pile of mashed potatoes on his plate. I wondered how

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many had shared in the chicken dinner during its underground passage to and back from the prison cooks. He had a merry, if rather heavy, wit.

We speak glibly of the importance of having a sense of humour, but we forget there are as many senses of humour as there are individuals. Here is an instance.

The penitentiary librarian was a mild person who appreciated quaint turns of speech. His job was to go round to each cell with a list of available books and magazines, so that his fellow convicts might take their choice.

Once, when he was about to hand a magazine through the bars to a man at the end of a row of cells, I came down the range to punch the time-clock, an arrangement which reported our faithfulness in doing our rounds. So I stopped and exchanged a few words whilst he glanced idly through the magazines in his hand to see if there was one that would suit me, for he knew my taste. In doing so he came on a verse ending with the line, "e ain't no more useful no' p'ison'. He read this out, tittering over it, and, as he did so, I caught the eye of the convict in the cell. And I could see there was something in that line which amused him also, but I was sure it wasn't the sound of the words that tickled him. Later, I learnt his record, and then I knew what he had found so amusing. It was the fact that anyone could be so simple as to think poison useless.

Altogether the discipline was pretty slack, but one or two hard cases had a rough time. One punishment was to chain a delinquent to his cell door in such a position that he had to stand on tiptoe. These unfortunates were breakers of prison rules, or those who had not enough diplomacy to keep in well with the guards or their fellow convicts. It is very easy to annoy some guards on mornings when they have a liver. It is also easy for tale-bearers to cause trouble. These

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unfortunates were, in fact, outlaws, the men who took their sentences seriously but not humbly. One of these boys (who, by the way, never gave me any trouble, but resolutely refused to notice the existence of any guard against whom he had a black mark) was a man of indomitable will and fortitude. He was oftener in the black hole than out. Solitary confinement meant darkness always, except during one hour's exercise a day, in an underground corridor, bread and water as sustenance (one slice of bread three times a day), with only one square meal a week unless by doctor's orders, no blankets, a cement floor to sleep on, and no ventilation to speak of. This man would stand about three weeks at a time of this sort of thing and then be removed by doctor's orders to hospital, only to insult the doctor repeatedly and get himself sent back again the moment he was adjudged fit enough. He was ordered fifteen strokes of the cat one day. After being left two days in the black hole to think it over, he was brought out one afternoon into the small exercise corridor attached to the punishment cells and there trussed to the triangles with his back stripped to the waist. All those guards who had just come off duty trooped down to witness the punishment, and I, inwardly quaking, but determined, as always, to learn all there was to learn about the job of the moment, went with them.

The cat does not have nine tails. It is a strip of leather something like a razor strop with circular holes about the diameter of farthings punched in it to cause suction and so rip off patches of skin.

It is an awful thing to see a fellow being trussed for torture. Perhaps one would get used to it in time. One reads in journals of Peninsular War veterans that one hundred or even two hundred strokes of the lash were not uncommon in the field, and that tough cases had been known to resume

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their places in the ranks after a severe flogging, their comrades carrying their guns and packs for them. Perhaps, therefore, floggings are not so horrible as the spectator imagines. Nevertheless, to me, it is bad enough to see a man belabouring a tethered horse, while to flog a helpless human being seems to me only describable as the sin against the Holy Ghost (whatever else that phrase may be intended to mean). In fact, when the sound of the blows reached my ears I felt just as if some lewd, and indescribably loathsome elemental, had suddenly materialized from the stones of that sullen cavern to gloat over this latest addition to his gallery of horrors. I later supposed, if there were any such emanation, it would really be in the nature of an emergent from the emotional reactions of those watching this sight. Anyway, whatever the source, I carried away the impression that to torture a bound and helpless man is to partake of the blackest conceivable sacrament, whereas to mutilate an enemy in the heat of battle is an entirely different matter. Battle is a Red Sacrament, a far healthier affair, as the inner nature of the average man is wise enough to recognize.

CHAPTER IX

WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY

THE penitentiary was a museum of distorted personalities. Not that the inmates seemed vastly different from luckier men. Still, just as a head-shave shows up unsuspected bumps and kinks in the cranium, so do soul-kinks stand out in merciless high-relief in those austere surroundings. Sheep shorn of their wool are not beautiful objects, neither are personalities stripped of their trappings and committed to a stark and unnatural honesty.

Deep in me I knew these men were honester than I. They had lived earnestly enough to fall into the traps I had avoided, not from any moral persuasion but from pure diffidence. There was some core to each of these unfortunates, however distorted that core might be. Compared with them I was all surface. No doubt I was unnecessarily hard with myself. My core was there all right but my nomadic habits had never given circumstances a chance to gnaw through the rind and expose it. So far I had refused to be bound by anything and so I had failed to grow up.

However, Life was spreading nets for me at last. First a purely personal net, then the universal net of the World War. To explain the former I must now revert to that combination which had brought me into the world, my parents.

It would be hard to find a queerer couple than my father and mother in conjunction, that is nakedly queer; though, of course, this world is crammed with oddities who manage to hide their kinks more or less. My parents could not even

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screen their peculiarities from the world, much less from each other. In fact by joining their fortunes they had prepared an engine which was to strip them as mercilessly as these poor convicts had been peeled naked by prison life. Marriage had been a natural-life sentence for both of them. They were so utterly unsuited that they were doomed to drive each other literally to distraction, for their respective eccentricities enflamed each other to the point of mania. My father was the first to succumb, but even his death did not release my mother. The damage had been done. He continued to have his revenge.

This denouement was now approaching its crisis. From my earliest observant years I had detected veiled hostilities in which, on the whole, I was inclined to side with my father, though my mother had her very few appealing moments. Then my starved affections veered towards her, only to be abruptly repulsed sooner or later.

That there must have been some original attraction between them, my presence and those of my brother and sister were proof. Indeed I seem to remember my mother ascribing my father's aversion to entertaining visitors to jealousy on his part. Further, my parents co-operated to this extent, that each would urge me to obey the other, the usual small change, in fact, of child management . . . You must do as your mother says . . . Your father knows best.

But by the time my brother had arrived, seven years after myself, these injunctions had lost their conviction and were occasionally interpolated with contradictory statements, such as:

'Your father is a very bad man.'

'Why, Mother?'

'You wouldn't understand.'

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And, once or twice only, from my father, 'Your mother is a wicked woman. That's inevitable, unfortunately, because she is the sister of your Uncle Joe'.

This uncle was that mysterious person who had once lived near Mount Nessing. As I had gathered from numerous hints that Uncle Joe, besides being fond of women and wine, was more than reckless with any moneys he happened to control, the connection appeared to me rather obscure. In fact, my mother even joined my father occasionally in denouncing this uncle's intemperate habits, for both my parents were teetotal.

My mother once also backed my father in a most extraordinary statement. I had been praising a certain friend of mine for his good looks, when my father suddenly cut me short with:

'Physical beauty is a curse. A beautiful face never goes with a beautiful mind.'

To which dumbfounding maxim I could think of no refutation at first. Then I ventured to remind him of the line, 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever', adding, 'Keats had a beautiful face, Father, and a beautiful mind'.

Whereon my mother chipped in, quite unexpectedly, with, 'The beauty of Keats's poems is a false beauty. There is no beautiful book but the gospel of our Lord'.

To my further surprise, my usually atheistic father endorsed her statement, though he was careful to add, 'The life of Christ is the most beautiful *human* story that has ever been *invented*'.

Which, of course, was rank blasphemy to my mother, so their temporary alliance disintegrated abruptly.

The simple ambition shared by my father has been stated by Pope in a poem the first verse of which he often quoted,

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Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.

A blissful existence indeed, and one that my father was rich enough in worldly goods to have realized if only he had been equally fortunate in his choice of the mate who brought him those worldly goods. For the farm where I was born belonged to my mother. My father had no real, and very little personal, estate in his own right.

He was quite content with the farm. So would I have been, but I longed to see the world before settling down. Always, back of my mind was the thought that I would return some day, repurchase that farm and live there with my books and beasts (the latter cared for by farm hands, of course), as my father had done during my earliest years.

Sound sleep by night: study and ease
Together mixed: sweet recreation,
And innocence, which most does please
With meditation.

Study, ease, meditation — these are hardly the lot of the working farmer. Nor does it seem he can afford to exhibit innocence in this competitive world. I understood this only too well. Nevertheless these things I meant some day to enjoy, and to enjoy them, if possible, amid my native acres.

Here, too, I may note another point. For me, the word 'country', when I was young, meant our farm and its environs, the further I strayed from which the less countryfied the rural landscape seemed. Even my uncles' farms, a few parishes removed, were never exactly 'the country' for me. Indeed, I have never recaptured that ecstatic 'Sabine farm'

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contentment elsewhere. Even the remotest spots, forested foothills and unpeopled valleys, have never conveyed the essence of the word 'pastoral' so implicitly as that tiny Eden of meadows and hedgerows in which I knew every tree and rabbit hole, and almost every molehill as soon as it was thrown up. The nearest approach to that feeling elsewhere came from the grounds of an old château in which we set up our horse-lines during one glorious week out of sound of the guns in Picardy. My birthplace was the centre of my earth, and the memory of it is the shrine of my *lars*.

Neither my father's nor my own ambition was to be realized. On the contrary, the same horrible fatality was to overtake both my birthplace and my parents. Once it was believed some houses were fated to transmit cancer. The destiny of my birthplace, that many-passaged, dark and rambling house where fear dogged my childish footsteps, has been even more macabre. Both my parents were to lose control of their mental faculties. As for the farm, it was to become irrevocably denied to me, even if I had possessed the money to repurchase it. For I discovered to my utter dismay, when revisiting the neighbourhood after the War, that the house had been turned into a private asylum. Thus in an uprooted age, I may claim to be the prototype of uprooted humanity. And, as with the man in the street, this unwelcome condition has been imposed on me from without by a reservoir of madness in which my direct participation is negligible.

The break between my parents had widened considerably when, contrary to my father's wishes, my mother had sold the farm and moved to Brighton. She now enjoyed far greater facilities for indulging her leanings towards communal religion. She felt she had no time to lose. For every Sunday she had missed church when buried in the country

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she now determined to spend three weekdays in holy occupations. Thus she soon came under the influence of all sorts of people who inflamed her religious pretensions still further.

My father, on the other hand, robbed of his cattle, his guns and his roses, and compelled to sally forth now in his so detested collar and tie, became silent and morose, burying himself in his study with his books, except when he had occasion to visit the reference library at the Dome. So matters had been when I left for Canada.

After I had been abroad for two years, my mother's letters, which had been gradually growing more fanatically Christian in tone, and at the same time less and less coherent, eventually ceased altogether. My father then wrote to tell me she had religious mania. This was horrible news. I knew what it meant only too well: for, some three years previously, my mother had taken me to see a school friend of hers so afflicted. We had found her sitting by the fire, with white wasted cheeks, and a very red nose, for she wept continually, saying she was sure she was damned and nothing could save her. When my mother produced a Bible, thinking to comfort her by reading from it, the poor woman shrank back, saying she was not worthy to hear the Word, nor could my mother prevail on her to listen. This experience was most distressing to me, as it was to my mother also; but I rather fancied she mingled with her sympathy a curious satisfaction, as of one who delights to find theories confirmed however ghastly the confirmation. Also possibly there was an aesthetic undercurrent, to which, personally, I was insensible, which may have set her nerves quivering in tune with some masochistic gratification in her friend's utter self-abasement. Now my mother's turn had arrived.

To me she had always been a forbidding personality. I could not sympathize with her now any more than previously.

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All that I felt was a general sympathy towards all hurt and broken creatures, and my mother was for me just one of these, no more.

In a few months my mother recovered. Although her letters remained severely religious in tone, they gained in strength and coherence. Her change of life was over, a new rhythm had established itself. She was temporarily sane and happy.

My father's letters had never been numerous. When they too became incoherent, I thought it not so strange. I concluded he was wrapped in his books and had become more absent-minded than ever, but never for a moment had I suspected the ghastly truth that his mind also was failing in its turn. My mother's lengthy spell of derangement must have affected him disastrously, for there were only the two of them in the house when my brother and sister were at school, and my father had no friends of his own, and certainly would not welcome any of the religious fraternity who came to visit my mother. I could just picture him rushing from the house the moment my mother, or the servant (if one had been induced to stay), had admitted any strangers. His collar and tie would be in his pocket, if he remembered them at all in his haste, and they would not be donned till he reached the first barber's shop.

Now the tables were turned properly, and it was my mother who wrote telling me my father was becoming very queer. Nevertheless, knowing how they reacted on one another, I did not take this information too seriously. I regarded this report as an inevitable caricature since it reached me from so prejudiced a quarter.

I had been at the penitentiary eleven months, and had heard nothing from home for the last ten weeks, when I had a letter from my mother's solicitor telling me my father was

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so ill it had been thought advisable to send for me. My passage money had been sent to a certain bank. In February, 1914, when this news arrived, I had been thinking of trekking south, for I wanted to see the Western States, and I thought there might be work offered by the preparations for the Panama Exhibition. From Reno I intended later to get somehow or other to the South Seas. This ambition was, of course, now shelved.

Arrived in London, I was met by my aunt, who supplied some distressing details. My mother was in a nursing home, for my father's condition had upset her badly, causing a breakdown. My father was alone in the house at Brighton, since he would have no servant about the place, nor would he consent to see a doctor. My aunt told me this in the tea-room at Euston Station. I wondered how many of the people also having tea there felt as miserable and at the same time as excited as I did. I felt excited because this, too, was romance and lent me importance in my own eyes.

Travelling down to Brighton at once, I reached the house about tea-time and found the door locked. After a long period of knocking, I heard some movement in the passage. I knocked again. Whereupon the bolts were withdrawn and the door opened an inch or so for a cautious eye to survey me. So soon as my father recognized his son, he flung his arms round my neck and burst out crying. This was most upsetting, because so unexpected. I had been prepared for violence, for irritation, or even for amusement on his part, for during the hour in the train I had almost come to believe that perhaps the information given me had been considerably exaggerated. This uncharacteristic demonstration on his part now inclined me to think I had been right. He was only very ill and very lonely. In fact, he did not look very different from when I had last seen him, for even then he

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had been careless in his dress and of pallid complexion. That his suit was badly stained with food did not surprise me. He was unshaven certainly, but there was nothing wild in his eye, though in the matter of speech he did seem a bit thick, and fumbled for words. Even so, he was no worse than a man exhausted by influenza might have been.

It was not until I went into the kitchen that I received the first visible hint that something was seriously wrong. For here things were in a terrible state, with half-emptied salmon tins, mouldering bread and filthy plates lying about everywhere, on the tables, chairs and floor. Like most madmen, my father was swift to divine suspicions of his sanity and pathetically cunning to cloak his symptoms. Reading my thoughts now he said in the most ordinary tones, 'The place is a bit dirty since your mother went away. Just help me to wash up and we'll have some tea.'

Taking him at his word, I handed my father a tea-cloth and started in on the dish-washing. Then I noticed he was standing holding the cloth and gazing into vacancy. So I handed him a dish which he at once dropped on the floor. Only then did I realize he had only partial control of his fingers. In fact, so uncertain was his handling of utensils, I wondered how he had ever managed to open that assortment of salmon and sardine tins.

After tea, my father said he would go out and get a shave. (This was in the days when barbers never closed, so far as I can remember.) I felt I should go with him, but he scouted the idea, assuring me he would be back in no time. In almost his old manner, he suggested I might like to renew my acquaintance with my books and other treasures which had lain fallow in my 'study', a room in the basement, ever since I had left England. This was, in fact, just what I was itching to do, for my fears were now considerably allayed. Evidently

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my father's condition had been grossly overpainted. Premature senile decay perhaps. Surely nothing more. So I let him go alone and was soon lost in an ecstatic re-discovery of my long-neglected library.

Presently I heard the front door open and then the shuffle of my father's returning feet. He came stumbling along the passage to my door in just his usual fashion so that I hardly looked up as he entered, for I was hunting for a favourite passage in a book of travels. When I *did* look up, finding his long silence unnatural, and warned by some nervous response to a tension in the atmosphere, I received the worst shock I had yet known in a not entirely sheltered career.

My father was standing facing me on the opposite side of the table. He seemed to be hardly breathing and his face was distorted, apparently with rage, into a positively inhuman mask. His eyes blazed like bale fires and his lips had assumed a rigid contraction which exposed the few blackened teeth in his jaws like an animal's fangs. Worse still, he did not seem to be looking at, but rather right through, me and he held his fist clenched and raised uncertainly as if contemplating an attack on someone immediately behind me. With the hair bristling on my nape, I swung instantly round, fully prepared to find someone there. Of course, there was no one, yet so convincing had been his attitude I almost believed my eyes were deceiving me and that he could really detect an apparition hidden from my own sight.

When I turned again to my father he was looking at me. I saw he had recognized me at last. And now he spoke.

Licking his lips, he suddenly spilt in a hoarse whisper such a string of profanity as I had heard only in the camps among the teamsters, words I had never connected with my father or with his sphere in life; unbelievably obscene they sounded too, from his usually so temperate lips. Could this really

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be my father who was speaking? The word 'possessed' flashed into my mind. I had never understood its meaning before.

And then I realized this vile tirade was not directed at me. He was trying to warn me of someone, of the apparition he had been gazing at a moment ago and of its power. In those few moments many thoughts rose to the surface of my mind. I wondered first what enemies my father could possibly have. Then I remembered his one-sided feud with my Uncle Joe, which had created a feeling so intense in my father that he could not conceal his satisfaction at being able to inform me that dissipation had at last killed him.

Yet I dismissed Uncle Joe almost immediately, for by some mental trick the vision rose in my mind of my grandmother's strong face distorted in wrath on the only occasion I had seen her in actual quarrel with my father, an event which had occurred about a year before her death. I knew there had been many things hidden from me, and with my sensitiveness to rebuff I had never worried my parents for an explanation. Yet many trivial incidents, hinting at some underground warfare, had been pieced together by mind amid the solitudes of Canada. My imagination had supplied the connections. So now, as if by a queer flash of insight, it came to me that it was of my grandmother that my father really went in fear. And this in spite of the fact that my father's words never corroborated this assumption. All that I learnt from his fumbling attempts to enlighten me was that he knew someone came behind him and placed red hot irons on the nape of his neck. He never explained to me what this familiar looked like. His references to it were always fragmentary, because, when he recovered the power of almost coherent speech after each attack he had only the haziest idea of what had been torturing him only a moment before,

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and his resentment subsided with the termination of each spasm of pain. His plight during a fit was pitiable, because he could not manage to raise his hands to the affected part, but only part way. This gesture was the one I had mistaken for one of half meditated attack.

Presently my father forgot his troubles and went up to bed. I followed him and tried to take his clothes off, but he would not permit this, getting quite violent. I had previously noted that he went about with unlaced boots. I now discovered that 'undressing' for him consisted in removing his boots (a lengthy process in his crippled state) and then lying down fully clothed. I also guessed why he repulsed my efforts to remove his clothes, for I heard money jingling in his pockets. He was afraid he might lose them and with them the money. He did not trust me. All this needed thinking out. Something would have to be done about those clothes or they would go rotten on him. I bade him good-night and went down again to my room. No sooner had I sat down than I burst into tears and lay with my head on the table crying for a long time. Then, finding I could not think clearly, I too went to bed, and I locked the door of my room. Though I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself for being afraid of an old man, and that old man my father, I could not have slept without turning the key. In fact I was thoroughly unnerved, not only by my discovery of his latent violence, but by the superstitious fears his delusions had awakened in me by some irrational infection.

When, however, next day I found how terribly feeble he was, even during his paroxysms of rage, I abandoned the locked door precaution, only to receive, a night or so later, a new fright; for I woke suddenly to find him bending over me with his face close to mine. He said he had come into my room to see if I were 'real'. This admission affected me

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terribly, for at once I realized, as I had never done before, how phantasmal his world had become.

I was now in a condition to believe anything. So it is not surprising, when one morning he did not come down to breakfast, and, on going up, I found him lying on his face on the floor with a trickle of saliva running from his mouth, I thought he was dead. But, on my touching him, my father opened his eyes, and, with my assistance, got to his feet in a most matter of fact manner. Apparently he had merely slept on the floor instead of on the bed. That night I induced him to let me remove his clothes, all except his trousers, which he clung to tenaciously, for his money was in the pockets. I hated touching his naked body, for it was all cold, flabby, and sprawly, and made me think of an animated corpse, a thing already dead and resuscitated by some earth-bound spirit to serve as its unwilling habitation. My macabre imagination delighted in presenting such theories to my tortured mind. To discipline it was almost beyond my power.

Cutting my father's toenails, I happened to slash the skin, but only the thinnest of fluids welled out of the puffy flesh. The organic cause of his trouble, as I learnt after his death, was anaemia and dropsy, a sort of dropsy that caused fluid to press on the base of his skull, hence the hot iron delusions. But, as he would not hear of seeing a doctor, I could not even manage to get him examined, much less treated. I *did* smuggle a doctor into the house once, by bringing him in to afternoon tea as a friend of mine, but my father, with uncanny insight, tumbled to the trick at once. By a great effort he managed to maintain his sanity almost perfectly till the medico had gone. Then he rated me soundly for trying 'to betray him to that poisoner'.

But the effort to control himself had done him good. He

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commenced to recover from that moment. On the whole he made wonderful strides, though he never became anything like normal, nor did he lose his delusions, though they became far less frequent. In the streets he would sometimes halt suddenly, turn painfully round and shake his fist at his elusive enemy. I was still an arrant enough young snob to feel uncomfortable when he did this in my company. I was thinking, of course, of the opinion of the passers-by. Would they take me for a male nurse? Which, of course, was just what I was, though not a particularly attentive one. Nevertheless, I like to think, my return at this particular juncture had improved my father's condition considerably, though no doubt the improvement would have been far greater under a really patient nurse. Sustained conversation with my father had always been an impossibility. He never would converse. He just used to discourse, and now he was not even capable of that. So I sought relief and amusement elsewhere, reckoning I had done my duty if I gave him his meals and walked with him for an hour or two daily. That was all I felt I could stand. My father's disease might be aggravated by his aversion to medical treatment, but what he needed quite as badly as such treatment was an understanding sympathy. And this he never got from anyone. He had shut himself off irrevocably years before. He had built up an impervious shell about his sensitivity. Now, when corruption had set in inside that shell, there was no means of breaking through to him.

During this period I had been visiting my mother at intervals, and had found her improving slowly. My father showed much curiosity as to her whereabouts, and often asked me when she was coming back. Habituated to the irritations she occasioned him, he felt incomplete without them. The roots of those irritations went no doubt very

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deep into his soul, springing originally from that long-buried Golden Age, when my parents still had some regard for each other. Eventually my mother got well enough to venture a return. So servants were induced to put up with my father, and my father to tolerate them. There was now no longer any need for me to stay. I had just succeeded in convincing the manager of a new cinema studio that my knowledge of varied strata of society in England and in Canada might be of use to him, when the outbreak of war closed him down indefinitely. I thought Christmas would see the end of the hostilities, and I was anxious to add a little more to my experience by chipping in before it should be too late. I had missed the Boer War by a year or two. I had no intention of missing this one, so I stifled my conscience, which told me plainly enough it was my duty to remain where I could visit my father whenever he had need of me, and went off to a recruiting office. My moral cowardice was so great that to be seen in mufti in wartime was every bit as embarrassing as one of those dreams in which one finds oneself parading the street without one's trousers. Only with the later realization that this attitude was inevitable in one who had received a soulless job-lot education, have I been able to excuse myself for this headlong desertion of a primary for an entirely secondary duty.

CHAPTER X

TRENCH FEVER

I JOINED up on August 10th. It had taken me a couple of days to realize that there was actually a war on. Then I had visited the Yeomanry H.Q. only to find that my old squadron was already full up. A week later, finding no move had been made to form another squadron, I walked across the road to another recruiting centre and was enrolled as a driver in a territorial field company of the R.E.s. Had I known the authorities had a four years' war in mind I might have attuned myself to their leisurely spirit. As it was, in company with many another untried brave, I rattled spear on shield in an agony of impatience. All however were not so impetuous.

The first thing some of us had to become inured to was not baptism by fire, but by water. There were at least a score of men in the two companies now training together at Eastbourne who had never had a bath before in their lives. Bathing parade was a fearful ordeal to these unfortunates, who had yet had the temerity to offer themselves for prospective service in water-logged trenches.

Because of my long-standing acquaintance with that fiddle-backed coffin-headed friend of man known to his humbler British acquaintances as the ' 'os', I was made the major's groom as soon as we were supplied with anything to groom. I was quite content to have a pair of hunters to exercise in lieu of the heavy drafts. Being a groom meant no parades, except ceremonial 'do's', and no picket duty either. It meant gallops on the downs whilst the ordinary

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drivers were snailing it along the roads with their 'hairies'. It meant long vigils in hotel yards, than which there are worse places to wait about in, especially in a khaki-worshipping community like 1914 England.

Also this irregular job gave me lots of time to pursue a new love-affair, my first serious adventure in that direction and one which my destiny let me in for at just the most inconvenient time. More however of that later!

In December we actually got to France and proceeded by *huite hommes quarante chevaux* (the drivers' mode of travel in contra-distinction to the sappers') to St. Omer, where we fired our first and only course on the range. When we suggested this preparation might be a little inadequate we were informed by our N.C.O.s that engineers were expected to work, not to fight.

That journey from Le Havre to St. Omer was the first I had made with horses as travelling companions. It is a curious experience. You lie on baled hay between two rows of heads — not horse-heads, surely? — rather the foreheadless masks, huge cavern-like eyes and slaving lips of some impossible monsters of fairy tale, for thus appear the noses of horses revealed by the light of a stable lantern when the tops of their heads are obscured in gloom. We drivers travelled between canyons of living gargoyles.

My 'bloke' (he didn't last very long in France) kept himself alive on whisky and, over the short four kilometres between our billets and St. Omer, which pilgrimage we made every night, he patented as many ways as did Alice's 'White Knight' of falling off his very, very sober charger.

'Bai Jove, Lecky! That was a purler, wasn't it?' was his invariable remark as I heaved him aboard again — unless, of course, he had reached a speechless stage.

We were first under shell fire in February 1915. Some

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Bengal Lancers being camped near us, one of our crude crowd wrote home: 'Dear Mother. We are in touch with the enemy at last. They are big, black men with beards and we see them squatting round their camp fires at night.' By which it will be seen that some of our mob were real yokels. They hadn't the faintest idea how far from England they were. One of their favourite songs was 'The Song of the Thrush', which begins, 'Far, far away in the wilds of Australia', and goes on about 'dear old England, at home, twelve thousand long miles away'. After we had shifted our billets a few times one or two of these boys seriously thought we must be near, or at least, half way to Australia. Reviewing our crowd, I could not but feel thankful that the Bengal Lancers were *not* our enemies. Not that they were all like that, but there was a sufficient sprinkling of pudding about our British beef to give me a helpless 'immobile' feeling. I took consolation from the thought that the average German reservist would probably be little different.

Ypres was doing business pretty much as usual in spite of the battered Cloth Hall. The best shops were quite civilized affairs too, and so were the private red-lights, innocent-looking estaminets where, unless the visitor murmured the pass-word 'aeroplane', he was not invited in. Being at that time, as I have hinted, engaged in a love-affair, I preferred to remain on the ground level.

A cheery community, bent on making the most possible out of the troops and on getting as much fun out of this hell-sent reign of Misrule, of which they had not yet had time to grow heartily sick. Belgium, with all its young men out of sight in the Line and most of its respectable burghers out of sight in the other direction, seemed to me to consist mostly of earthly troll-like creatures, warped out of shape

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by gross-living, rheumatism, senility, accident, wounds acquired in other wars, overwork in factories or in the fields, excessive child bearing, and once again gross-living or rheumatism, according to the status of the specimen.

After Hill Sixty, Ypres caught the backwash of German commotion. To use a dame-school simile invented by the British Tommy, who is no Agag among the egg-shells, 'Fritzzy'd 'ad 'is skirts blowed up round 'is ears properly, an' now somebody was in for a caning'. As a direct result of Fritz's 'wind up', we had orders to evacuate our billets in the cavalry barracks, and proceeded to do so through a pululating mass of civilian refugees and under a rain of shell fire that seemed phenomenal to our 1915 innocence. We had been told to concentrate in a certain square. We obeyed this order in spirit, though it was impossible to carry it out to the letter. In the confusion each man had to act for himself. I grabbed my ponies (pack ponies at that time, my Major having already gone back to England), loaded them with as much gear as I could find and got out into the crowded streets. As I left the stable, a salvo crashed through the roof. One shell exploded inside a two-days-dead horse just outside the yard gate as I galloped through, splashing me liberally with its abominable juices. I was very glad to reach the open country at last and to have a bathe in a ditch. Then I jogged along comfortably among the stream of refugees, eventually overtaking some of our crowd and so losing that lost child feeling which the soldier away from his unit knows so well.

That night we collected cigars and bottles of wine *ad lib* from the later fugitives who had found time to do a little looting on their way. I heard that a couple of Canadians never *did* come out of the town, but lived on the fat of the

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burghers' cellars, in company with a couple of Belgian trollops, till the M.P.s smoked them out. A short war and a merry one was evidently their motto.

Ypres burned for about a week. During that week I wrote an essay for a *Saturday Westminster Gazette* competition, and, wonder of wonders, landed the prize. Our new major got to hear of this, just about the time when a general order came out that no officer must enter the trenches unaccompanied by at least one other rank as body guard. As I was at best an erratic specimen from the transport sergeant's point of view, with very sketchy ideas about grooming and harness-cleaning, as, in fact, they found me a nuisance and a bad example in the horse-lines, I was made permanent orderly to the officer of the day, so I now had a chance to see the trenches. I retained my two pack ponies as saddle-horses. All three of us thrived wonderfully on this arrangement. By 'officer of the day' I don't mean the orderly officer, but that one detailed to inspect the R.E. work in our section of the line. Occasionally I had a night trip as well.

From Dikebusch we used to ride almost to the canal and then, leaving our horses with a groom, proceeded on foot. The communication trench began in the grounds of a château whose summer-house was used as a morgue for bodies awaiting burial. The moat was half spanned by a twisted iron footbridge, which had been partly demolished by something heavy and explosive. In the moat lived a solitary swan. Such scenes have been described a-plenty in that spate of war-books by means of which England has recently sought to get the hang-over of the War out of its system, yet I mention this because it fills me with an irresistible urge to quote William Morris:

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'The draggled swans most eagerly eat
The green weeds trailing in the moat;
Inside the rotting, leaky boat
You see a slain man's stiffen'd feet.'

Stiff feet despoiled of their boots, divorced for evermore from sympathetic communion with the earth, that deserted pleasance, that orphaned swan, the above verse, these things epitomize War from the aesthetic stance.

In the late summer of 1915 we moved to Bray-sur-Somme. Here I received a telegram saying my father was dead. I applied for special leave.

I must now record the details of that love affair which I have already mentioned, for, although short and conducted over its greater length by letter, it affected not only the course of this leave but of my after life.

Hitherto I had been content always to act the role of observer. I enjoyed vicarious excitement from being where things were stirring. I liked to be among Red Indians, art students, convicts, cowboys or soldiers, because of the romantic kick I drew from such associations. Each individual wore the halo of his type for me, yet I kept myself aloof from the influence of any type. I was all the time an observer gazing at a panorama, playing at being a part of that panorama, yet refusing to become absorbed into it. With my return to England to find my father demented, the initial crack had been effected in my crab-shell of indifference. Thereafter I was free to grow till another shell formed. That first evening of my return, when his sudden outburst of fury had taken me off my guard, had proffered me the first real adventure of my life. Enduring demi-semi starvation, sporadic love making with women whom I could not, however much it was my desire to do so, take seriously, being

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scared stiff by that diabolic wolf in the night or that almost equally demoniac lynx in the day had all been experiences which I had enjoyed on reflection because they had fed my sense of romance. Even my father's madness, as I have already hinted, had compensations in that it fed my sense of importance.

Now, on this leave, something different was in store for me. I was to receive another shock, so intimate in its application as to demolish my shell entirely; I could not bear to look back on it, for there was no romance here, only sordid disillusion. To maintain the simile of the crab, I found myself so badly crushed that my shell-rebuilding faculty remained paralysed for a very long time.

As I have confessed, I did not enlist from patriotism. It was just part of my scheme of 'see the world and earn while you learn', a scheme which was so in accordance with the outlook of other youths that the Imperial Army adopted it as a recruiting slogan after the War. In much the same irresponsible spirit I had become engaged. And just as the army got a tighter hold on my liberty than I had bargained for, so the girl grew into my affections so intimately that, when the time came to pluck her out again, I felt as if most of my real self had been torn away in the operation. Further though, as I realized afterwards, my feelings had exaggerated the damage thus done to them; the pain of breaking with Lily staged for me a most curious psychological (if not, as I sometimes think, a psychic) phenomenon.

When we had shifted to a training camp at Canterbury before leaving for France, I was billeted, by some strange stroke of luck, in a house where there were no other soldiers. The people were more or less of my status in life, independent but not remarkable socially. Lily was the one daughter left at home, and, the moment I set eyes on her, I knew she

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would suit me as a sweetheart. I say 'suit', because my attitude was neither deep nor heroic. I merely recognized a possible mate, possessed not only of physical allure but companionable qualities. She seemed to have the same feeling about me. That was all-sufficient under the stimulus of martial circumstances to make me snatch at the chance of a brief spell of happiness that might perhaps be my last. I proposed and was accepted by Lily exactly a week after I had entered the house. In that week we had got to know one another quite well enough to warrant the move, in my opinion. The very first evening, not knowing what to do with my rations, which I had just drawn in their raw state, I had chosen a door at random in the apparently deserted house and had knocked on it. So I had encountered a slim, red-headed girl from whose smouldering green eyes I had been powerless to avert my gaze. Nor could I forget them when, having handed over the food, I returned to my room. After washing, I tried to read but found it hopeless. I kicked myself for having dodged away without engaging that girl in conversation. Our fingers had touched. My whole chemistry, aroused thereby, was now in full blaze. I hadn't the faintest idea who she was, but I knew I should have no peace till I had spoken to her again. I must do something. I could not possibly wait. So, on the chance of seeing some sign of her *en route*, I went down into the garden and, while waiting for the summons to eat, paced to and fro, dwelling on the image I retained of her delicate features, her long and slender neck, her sloping shoulders and the suggestion of little apple-shaped breasts beneath her blouse. In my confusion I had seen no more of her than that, but I was sure her feet would be narrow and arched and the rest of her in keeping. I must not let the next chance slip. I would ask her to come to the pictures that very night.

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But what if she were a servant and had been dressed for going out? In that case she might have gone already. I should miss my chance. Unendurable thought! I searched all the windows with eager eyes.

And then a gong sounded. Was this intended for me? Nothing had been said about my footing in this house. Would I be fed in the kitchen or at the dining-room table? How awkward if she were a servant after all and they hailed me into the dining-room! True, she had not looked like a servant. Still, I had made mistakes of that sort before. Then my doubts were resolved, for, heralded by the barking of a toy dog, she, herself, appeared to fetch me. Her figure was the ideal figure of my dreams, and it was clad in some sort of an evening frock. In a delirium of desire, I followed, to be ushered into the dining-room.

She went to the pictures with me that night. The next evening we spent in a wood outside the town. The third night she left her door open and, when the household had gone to bed and I judged all asleep, I slipped into her room. Our affair lasted uninterrupted for almost three months. Then we were ordered to France. Against my conscience, instead of visiting my father perhaps for the last time, I spent my 'overseas' leave with Lily. Then we entrained and I realized it was all over . . . for the time . . . for such a long time . . . perhaps for ever. This was my first love affair of such long standing and it had been delightful, every day of it. Looking only for physical pleasure, I had found not merely that, and in such measure as I had never known before, but also a splendid companion as I thought, for Lily had had a fair education and her voice and intonation satisfied my rather exacting ear. I was entirely enthralled. Correspondence was to bind that thralldom sevenfold. For the writing of love letters, especially when one has to exercise

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restraint owing to consciousness of the censor's eye, is a delightful agony. We bound each other to write by every possible mail. And write we did every day. It seemed to me later that I found in her letters all sorts of excellencies which were purely imaginary. But they kept me profoundly in love and true to her memory, after my fashion, which, at that time, was a far stricter fashion than that of Cynara's lover.

Now, when granted leave to attend this funeral, my father being dead, I did not feel any compulsion to rush home. One night would make no difference. If the funeral were over when I arrived, so much the better. For I hated funerals and regarded them as superstitious rites surviving from the happily vanished past. So, instead of travelling directly to Brighton on my pass, I made for Canterbury, intending to spend this first night with Lily. And, just to enhance our pleasure, I intended to stage a surprise arrival.

The leave boat berthed at Dover soon after dawn. I duly found myself in Canterbury an hour later. Of course, the streets were still fairly empty, and Lily's household would certainly be still in bed; but I had no intention of cooling my heels outside, or of waking the family for that matter. I knew a trick worth two of that. For, opposite the window of Lily's room, was a tall laurel tree from the midmost branches of which one could look into her window. I intended to scale this tree and pelt her bed with pebbles till she woke. Then I pictured her flying to the window, — for I had used this signal on a previous occasion, — and so to the door to admit me in decent privacy. Tingling with anticipation I entered the garden, glanced up at the beloved window to assure myself it was open, and then filled my pocket with pebbles.

Swiftly and silently I swung myself in to the most favour-

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able position, purposely refraining from looking at the window till I had arrived opposite it, so that I could give all my attention to my footing and thus avoid any unnecessary noise. My heart was pounding with excitement. Suddenly it stopped as if a bullet had entered my breast. Worse than that, I felt just as if a heavy spear had been thrust into me and was bearing down on my entrails with all its weight. That is the only way I can attempt a description of that overwhelming and immeasurable stab of pain which invaded and flooded my whole being when, on looking squarely in the window, I saw not only Lily in the bed, but beside her, and lying with her head on his shoulder, a young man in blue silk pyjamas.

A thousand wild schemes raced through my brain. Immediate action was what my whole outraged emotional system demanded, but reason was not slow to point out and insist on my ludicrous position. 'You have laughed at such situations in *Boccaccio*. Laugh at this one, damn you!' so I taunted myself. 'You can't reach that window without serious risk of falling. And, if you could, what then? Does your engagement to Lily justify you in raising a disturbance that would involve the whole family? Go away. Take your time to think things over. Then come back!'

Thus, though half-demented with rage and jealousy and self pity, I prevailed on myself to descend that laurel as quietly as I had gone up. Then I betook myself to the streets to walk furiously, I hardly knew where, while my brain rushed round and round in a futile circle. This was the end. There was nothing to be done. This was the end. God, how ghastly! This was a situation one simply could not remedy. It was so definite. If only I could have got leave earlier, in time to stop this affair at its outset, I felt I might have still handled it. But what would have been the good

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of that anyway? I should never have been able to trust her again. Surely this was the best possible thing that could have happened to me, this stark revelation. Of course, I had had secret doubts, many times. Lily's letters had often seemed ready made. Then they had been followed by others more passionately couched, but still having rather a brittle ring. Yet I had reproached myself with disloyalty at my suspicions. Her body had so enthralled mine that my imagination simply refused to entertain any treasonable thoughts towards our love. True, on one or two occasions, as I have hinted, I myself had found the compact irksome. But I had kept it. I did not pause to reflect that a good-looking and passionate girl is liable to be exposed to far greater temptations than a man. I had been true all these months. She had been false. There was nothing to be done. This was the end.

It will be noted I make no reference to any thoughts of vengeance against the man. This is not because I did not feel any, but because I felt so helpless. I had arrived on the scene too late. What was the use of anything now? Probably he did not even guess of my existence, damn him. How could I admit I had been spying on them through the window. My position was hopeless. It was cruel.

Presently I noticed people were looking at me inquisitively, for, though I had left my heavier kit at the station cloak-room, my appearance was not at all like that of a home-service soldier. I was dirty and unshaven. No doubt my face was unnaturally white and set. They probably thought I had been drinking as well. Prudence reminded me that I might be pulled up by the military police before long. I must watch my step. I slowed down and started to get my bearings.

Noticing a barber's shop now open, I rushed in and had myself shaved and cleaned. Then I saw a pub across the

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road and, though it nearly choked me, for the pain inside me seemed something solid, filling even my throat, I swallowed three double whiskies in quick time. After that I felt a little better and, hearing the gong go for breakfast in the hotel, I judged it would be breakfast time at Lily's house also. I must see her. I must. Why not now? Get it over quickly and get away. I would see her at once. So back I rushed to the house with only the vaguest notion of what I intended to say or do when I got there.

The door was opened by the housemaid who, recognizing me, was all for showing me into the dining-room where the family was already breakfasting. I elected to wait in the drawing-room, begging the maid to announce my arrival, but to ask them not to disturb themselves till they had finished breakfast. Of course, I had counted on Lily showing a little more precipitation than the others. This she did, rushing into the room at once and immediately making to fling her arms round my neck with so perfect an assumption of natural delight that I was staggered. Had my eyes deceived me? Was my memory playing me a trick? Had I really just come from the station? The feel of my shaven chin as I fingered it in perplexity was sufficient proof of the morning's realities. With a swift movement I evaded her arms and, as I did so, I read in her eyes a sudden fright. She half glanced out of the window at the laurel tree, and I read her thoughts accurately. And she knew what I was thinking too. She went as white as her namesake, as she waited for me to speak.

'I've come to say good-bye to you, Lily.' I managed to jerk enough air out of my contracted throat to get this said. Then I turned to go.

'Peter! Peter!' How queer her voice sounded, like some strange, rasping instrument! 'Don't, don't leave me like this!' Acting? No, she wasn't acting. Damn her, she meant it.

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'You know what I saw,' I said still in a hatefully melodramatic voice that I had no hope of controlling. 'How do you think I could ever trust you again? I ought to kill you.'

She made to clutch my sleeve, but I flung her aside and rushed out of the room. I felt I must get into the fresh air at once. If I stayed a moment longer I felt I should really seize that slender white neck which it had been my heaven to kiss only a few months ago — seize it with both hands and squeeze, squeeze, squeeze until I had strangled the life out of her.

As I rushed through the hall, I saw a young man in an officer's uniform, buckling his Sam Browne as he descended the stairs. He looked the sort of man who would always be late for breakfast. A trait which has certain advantages, I reflected bitterly, after my impetuous rush back to the station, where I found I had two hours to wait.

When I reached Brighton my mother had just returned from the funeral. I hated the sight of her weeds, for I knew they were just as much a farce as Lily's letters of the last month. Even more abominable, in fact, for evidently Lily still retained some feeling for me, whereas I knew my mother must be experiencing nothing but relief at the death of my father. Hardly hearing what she said, I played with a meal, the first I had tackled since leaving Bray-sur-Somme forty odd hours ago.

My father had been insensible to the last . . . much swollen . . . dropsy in the neck . . . a rare and obscure complaint, that was what had given him those hot iron delusions . . . the dropsy had spread so much at the last that they had had difficulty in getting the body into its coffin . . .

Ah! How could my mother be so inhumanly impersonal? I rose with a muttered apology and rushed from this house as I had fled from that other. Action! Action and action

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alone would save me from a breakdown. Once clear of the town and out on the cliffs at Black Rock, I felt slightly better. Settling into my marching pace I pushed rhythmically forward against a rising wind. Oblivion in rhythmic action, that was what I sought instinctively. This tension must unwind itself in this way and in no other. Otherwise my spring would snap.

Am I mixing metaphors? Well, let the mixture symbolize the dreary milling of my mind. My thoughts which had first whirled furiously as in some destructive maelstrom now swirled sluggishly like leaves in some tired backwater. And all the time that scene from the branches of that hateful laurel haunted my memory, refusing to be exorcized.

I walked to Newhaven and back. Well after dusk, I remember seeing a large hawk slip out of a cleft in the white cliff to hover head on into the wind. It was almost dark. The bird could not possibly have intended serious hunting. He did not stay long, two minutes perhaps, for I paused to watch him. Then he dropped backwards with the wind and swept round again into it and so up again to his perch in the cliff face. I could see his tail moving for a while just below me as I leaned over. Then he crept further in and was lost to sight. This incident brought back to me George Locke and an Indian legend he had heard somewhere. The myth told how a rock fell sick one day, and after a while split open, giving birth to a falcon. I considered idly what natural phenomenon could have given rise to this legend. Then suddenly my mind gave it up and returned to its private hell. There was that hateful bedroom again and here was I with my whole world split open and nothing born from the rupture except this dull dragging pain in the very centre of me.

I turned back to the white chalk road and rushed blindly

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on. When I mounted the stairs to my room at some hour in the early morning, I felt hardly more tired than if I had been for a slight stroll — and I had had no sleep on the boat the night before, nor on the train the night and day before that. Only my feet felt rather sore.

Once in bed, however, I must have dozed, or how account for the dream which followed, or was it really no dream but actuality? For suddenly I knew my father was bending over me, much as he had done on that night when he had come to see if I were real. Only he was not friendly now. His face was horribly swollen and puffy and it was horribly distorted too. Lower and lower he bent. Now his hands were at my throat. He was in a towering rage and was evidently determined to do me some harm. My breath seemed actually cut off as though his fingers were squeezing my gullet. With a terrible effort I wrenched myself absolutely awake — and there he still was, hovering mistily by my bedside, his features now indistinguishable. Yet the cloudy shape certainly held human semblance for an instant. Fascinated with the horror of it, I watched him roll up into the darkness as a swirl of vapour dissipates before a puff of wind. That I was wide awake from the moment I made that effort to escape, I am perfectly sure.

My terror ousted my heartache for the moment, but not for long. Soon the two emotions and their strata of thought intermingled to hold in my brain the ghastliest debate conceivable. Now why? Why should my father have behaved so? What harm had I done him by not attending his funeral? It could not be that. Perhaps his resentment went farther back than that. Was he angry with me for deserting him to run off to the War? Or, farther back still, for leaving him so casually to cross the Atlantic for no special reason except to get away from home? Yes, that must be it. But what

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else could I, being myself, have done? Surely he must now know, if he knew anything, that my temperament could not have stood the unhealthy mental atmosphere of that home. Still I might have been less brusque, more thoughtful, more sympathetic on many and many an occasion.

Well, it was too late now. From my double grief at last I found relief in tears, great strangled sobs which racked me like paroxysms of muscular contraction. And, when I had cried myself into a headache, I sought further relief in prayer; the first prayer I had ever attempted. First I prayed to God to set things right for me with my father and to rob me of all memory of my faithless woman; then I besought my father, if he could hear me, to forgive all the pain and disappointment my lack of sympathy had caused him. I will pray for you, Father, I promised. And then again I pleaded to God, if He indeed existed, to hear my prayer and to ease my father's pain if any persisted for him where he now was.

Easy to regard this as primitive superstition, as even *I* do at times. It may have been. At the same time it was just what I, being myself, had to do . . . and did instinctively when confronted by the particular combination of phenomena I have tried to portray. I was overwrought, and prayer brought me relief, as it has brought relief to countless others of approximately my stage of development. Under the right circumstances, both external and internal, prayer comes as naturally to a man as second wind comes to a runner.

That leave was one long agony. I was glad to get back to France. Naturally my mother thought it was grief for my father's death which had stricken me dumb. I did not enlighten her. When I returned to the company I had, in self-defence, to become a different person, otherwise I could not possibly have carried on. Where before I drank by way of experiment, I now drank to drown memory. Where I had

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avoided the crown-and-anchor merchants, I now sought and found feverish amusement in staking all the money I could get hold of; little enough, but my romantic temperament easily converted it into serious sums, once I gave that temperament rein. Then again, my behaviour in the line became more reckless, or, if you prefer it, less careful. I felt above petty attempts to save my skin, and Providence seemed to support me in this assumption.

I was reckless out of the line too. I got drunk one evening when we were on the march to take over a new sector. Sleeping it off in a wood, I woke to find the company had moved off without me. Luckily, I managed to hop on to a lorry proceeding in the right direction, but it was only by great good fortune that I eventually overtook them, for I hadn't the faintest idea where they were bound. I turned up two days late. They were already in the line. I expected severe punishment, yet did not fear it; I was indifferent; and I got off with a reprimand.

At this time, too, I noticed my susceptibility to the beauty inherent in small things had become vastly enhanced. A lark hovering above the trenches, spilling its music like a torrent of seed pearls, would fill my eyes with tears. I often felt an embarrassing urge to stop and stare at the sunset behind the shell-splintered copses or even perhaps at a wayside flower. This too, not only when alone, but in ribald and impatient, or official and also impatient, company. This was most awkward, for if ever the truth of the proverb, there is a time and a place for all things, were apparent, that truth is most apparent in wartime. Of course I managed to fight against this tendency and beat it down, yet I felt that, in so doing, I was missing the chance to discover some all-satisfying, all-important secret just around the corner of everyday experience. Perhaps if I had lingered to give way

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to this urge a fraction of a second too long at some spot marked 'Danger. Sniper', that secret might have become suddenly mine.

I now applied for a commission, for it is certainly not the pace that kills in trench-warfare. Nothing came of my application. A year passed and, by dint of accepting every form of dissipation that offered wherever we trekked, I found myself restored to a reasonable interest in life. Yet there was always an empty feeling as if part of me had been cut away. When I say 'every dissipation', I don't include the regulation red lights. I could never bring myself to queue up for a woman in that worse than bestial fashion. I did, however, pick what compensations might be privately offered in farm-houses and estaminets.

I made rather a bad break at Bethune, however. There was an estaminet on the canal, and in it a very pretty girl. From the roof of the saloon hung a toy aeroplane. Remembering the significance of the 'aeroplane' password at Ypres, I thought I would try my luck with it here. But that 'Open Sesame' was evidently unknown in this district. And when I tried to explain the allusion, Celeste apparently thought I wanted to buy the aeroplane. She explained, she could not sell it, for it was a gift from her fiancé in the Flying Corps. To make amends to my own conscience, I went into the city and bought her a silk apron, returning with which I was knocked galleywest by the first words with which the little rogue greeted me.

'Did monsieur buy his aeroplane elsewhere?'

She had known all along what I wanted. My hopes revived with a bound; but were again doomed to disappointment. Very carefully she now repeated her former statement. The aeroplane was being kept as a present *for* her fiancé in the Flying Corps. I had tripped on that 'for'.

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About this time I was detailed to lose a mule. No one could do anything with the brute. I could stop on its back, but only until it chose to lie down. And that was how it had us all tricked. So the sergeant said, 'I've been talking to the captain about that brute and he says he's got to be lost. You'd better take him out, Lecky, and get him hit by a shell.'

Naturally, I gaped.

'That's how it'll go down in the report,' the sergeant added. 'We'll leave the details to you.'

So I took that mule down to water, for he would lead all right, and turned him loose. Then I waited to see the fun. Sure enough some smart Alec from a field battery picked him up right away and, the last I saw of the brute, he was moving off cunningly hidden between two large draught horses.

Entering the adjutant's tent to report personally, as I had been instructed to do, I found a whisky bottle on a shell box.

'Help yourself, Lecky!' the adjutant invited. So I pocketed the bottle.

'Damn your eyes, you've got a neck!' the adjutant exclaimed. To which I answered, 'Surely my reputation for truth is worth a whole bottle of whisky, Sir!'

So I got away with the bottle.

Yet a month or two passed and instructions were issued that likely men were to be sent home for commissions. I applied again, this time on the advice of the C.O. The application worked with miraculous swiftness, but not before I had developed a bout of trench fever, for we were in the waterlogged sector opposite La Bassée at the time. Although I could hardly crawl for weakness, I refrained from going sick, for I knew by experience what strange complications arise in the army when a man gets away from his unit for any purpose whatever. One's claims to any welcome change

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are sure to be passed over during one's absence in favour of someone on the spot.

Eventually my papers came through and on the strength of them I was granted two months' leave, the first two weeks of which I spent in bed in my mother's house, for I had never been so ill in my life before.

CHAPTER XI

HOW I WON THE WAR

AN army communiqué, like a trades' commission report or a mining company's prospectus, dwells in the realm of absolute truth. It is history in the large sense of the word, unrestricted to detail, pure art. Yet it cannot be reproached with being art for art's sake. There is always a deeper significance than a mere urge to paint the lily. As there can be no landscape without a frame, though that frame be constituted by the horizons, so is the warscape limited by the stern necessities of propaganda. The army communiqué may therefore be designated as *truth with a difference*, not fresh eggs, nor even new-laid eggs, but the very newest laid, hot from the hen, not merely cream, but *creamand*. Thus, in discovering that the French won the War, that the Americans (perhaps I should have given them precedence) won the War, that the Germans actually won it but were too bashful to say so at first, and that the Austrians also won it, each entirely off their own bat and in spite of the unwearying efforts of their glorious allies to cramp their style, in learning all this, we recognize as in a composite photograph, the generic type of the conqueror, the real lineaments of the Winged Victory, the essential soul of mankind which knows not when it is beaten. It is true indeed then, that each one of us did, virtually, on his own dunghill, perform deeds of superhuman prowess, entitling him to clap his wings and crow his loudest for ever more, since the lords of dunghills are so constituted as to clock the hours with unfailing officiousness under all circumstances.

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So, by the above immutable law, I too can claim to have won the War. I, myself . . . but not alone, for I see no reason why I should exclude certain worthy acquaintances of mine from their share of my claim. We will record then, that the beginning of the War was won by the old contemptibles on both sides; the middle, by the new armies, the territorials and the *landwehr*; and, that after conscription came in, the tail end was most gloriously supported by the temporary gentlemen and the N.C.O.s of both the Allies and the Central Powers, who one and all proved the backbone of the medley of boys, cripples, conscripts, war-weary remnants, sutlers, camp followers and, yet again and ever again, undernourished boys among whom they found themselves unavoidably distributed.

Having made this generous admission, it would seem unhandsome to risk diluting it by devoting further space to the subject. Yet I shall take that risk, because I believe what I have to say in this chapter must inevitably confirm rather than weaken the above summary.

On then with the *Danse Macabre!* *Vive le son d'un canon!*

The three months' intensive training at Gales gave me a new lease of life. Good Scottish brose and scones put a fresh coat to my stomach, while doing everything at the double limbered up my trench-sodden circulation till I felt like one of those millionaires one reads of in Woodhousian works, who emerge after a refresher course at some bruiser's sanatorium feeling like urchins escaped from school.

An officer's uniform also undoubtedly put a cheerier complexion on my existence. I was not just a 'Bloody 'ero' now. I was an idol in khaki. During the month's leave which followed I did my best to dissipate dull care at a certain mixed baths which sought to emulate the luxuries of similar institutions that flourished in Rome at the height of her profitocracy.

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When things are going wrong and there is no immediate chance to set them right, there is great comfort to be gleaned from the mechanical exercise of physical functions. Horses know this. Twice I have seen horses with broken legs grazing nervously and voraciously whilst waiting to be shot; and I remember another horse who, bogged up to his shoulders in a dyke, relinquished the hopeless struggle and started to nibble at the grass on the bank which he could just reach by snaking out his neck. These ignorant creatures may connect the idea of pain with that of hunger and so strive to appease the disturbance by stuffing. Or again, like myself, they may seek consolation from boredom and misery by tickling up the peptones within.

Eventually I left for France and my brother's unit. I have not mentioned this brother of mine before, because I had really seen so little of him that my life was not in any way affected by his existence. Now, however, having prevailed on his C.O. to write for me, he comes temporarily into the pattern, only to disappear almost immediately into a German prison camp. They say it is unlucky for brothers to serve in the same unit. Here would seem to be a case in point.

At first he was reported killed, whereupon the War became my war for the first time. Then on Christmas Day, 1917, I heard from my mother that he was wounded and a prisoner at Saarbrücken. The whole battalion shared my joy, for he was a most popular youth. A little later I received a postcard from him complaining that he hadn't had a decent smoke for '— ages'. I quote the phrase as amended by the German censor, a wag who allowed his blue pencil, while meticulously performing its duty, to betray the shape of an apparently forbidden word.

Followed for me a variety of new experiences in divers and everchanging capacities. I was platoon officer, temporary

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O.C. transport, billeting officer, town major, tunnel major, and, every little while, again platoon officer. Of these experiences I am tempted to relate just one, because it illustrates how magnificent is the nerve of the Irishman on the field of battle, as elsewhere. I remember once, when going up to relieve the Irish Guards on the Broombeek, opposite the Houdhouldt Forest, being thrown into considerable trepidation by the horrible suspicion that our guide had lost his way. As we wandered on and on over the worst duck-board track I had ever encountered, and seemingly always turning to the right till I was sure we must have crossed our own tracks at least twice, I even confess to a growing suspicion that this jaunty guardsman was some Prussian in disguise, specially detailed to mislead us and make us late for the rendezvous. Then at long last we heard Irish voices in the dark. Whereon our guide turned to me, with a quite discernible note of relief in his tone, to say, 'Here we are, Sorr'. Then he added, with a superb and immediate assumption of perfect ease, 'Did ye think I had ye lost, Sorr? Why, I could have got ye here, had ye had me blinded with winkers.'

We were only four hours late.

I must now record a leave which I spent, perforce, from lack of money, with my mother at a Christian boarding house at Eastbourne. The spiritual atmosphere of that select watering place had always seemed to me rather puddingy. I now found myself plunged right into the centre of that atmosphere. Here the pudding was palpable. In this establishment the conversation never veered far from two subjects, souls and food. These good people believed themselves quite capable of saving their souls (and if there is anything in those philosophies which regard the soul as the earthiest part of our psychic make-up, perhaps they were

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right). However, they thought the navy should do a little more towards protecting their food supply. They discussed and compared local preachers with as much fervour as the worldly might display when comparing picture stars; but every little while they would shelve this absorbing topic, for a few anxious minutes, to ask me how long I thought the war would last, chiefly, I gathered, with reference to that vexed question of the permanence of England's food supply. They seemed to think I must know all about the war, getting such a close-up view. On the question of food, one acidulated female mentioned the reported shortage in Germany, and expressed a pious hope that it would soon bring those wicked people to their knees. A slightly more milky female thought this was hardly just. She amended the hope into a prayer that the Germans would be brought to see the error of their ways, even as that hard-hearted Pharaoh was moved to loosen up after the smiting of the First Born. Whereupon a sag-paunched, heavy-jowled cleric settled the matter authoritatively by announcing, as clearly as he could with his mouth full of fish-ball, 'Have no fear on that head, Miss . . . er . . . (mumble), *we* shall not be the ones who are starved into submission. God will protect His faithful people.'

It was all I could do to refrain from calling for three hearty British cheers for the spokesman. Possibly I was saved by the fact that my mouth was full of fish-ball. Anyhow, I could not have believed such sentiments existed, if I had not spent that particular leave in that particularly nauseating fashion. And these were my mother's chosen cronies! Somehow I found myself yearning for my lousy and blasphemous bully-boys.

Nevertheless, when I returned to France and we had the hard word put on us for a raid, I reconsidered this preference.

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Would I volunteer? Would I not! Blighty (even with fish-balls) or my old stable jacket every time! So I took to patrolling no-man's-land in preparation for the raid. This was my first taste of patrol work, and I must say I liked it. Between the trenches one is practically safe from flying-pigs, shell-fire, and other major abominations. And to lie still watching a German working party or waiting for a German patrol to pass I found pure joy even though I might be soaked to the skin and plastered with clammy mud. Excitement kept me tingling. It was as good as kissing a woman or winning at cards or finding some unfamiliar animal or digging up Roman pottery. I even enjoyed (in retrospect) getting hitched up by my pants one night and being unsuccessfully hunted for by two alert lads who heard my struggles in the wire.

First, '*Wer'st da?*' in a stage whisper, then a clambering around of conscientious defenders seen dimly against the stars. Then intense fear as one of them all but walked on to me. Finally the relief of realizing they had given up the search.

I was not a good scout, but the unit on our right had another temporary gentleman who was. He had been an Australian digger before he got his commission. He was positively uncanny in his power of slipping about in the dark and getting things done, useful things. One morning just before dawn he marched back into the trench driving before him a Fritz quartermaster-sergeant and his post corporal complete with mail bag. He had gone right between Jerry's posts and had collected this welcome issue in their supports.

We made a mess of that raid but it served my purpose. The Blighty I collected consisted of one bullet wound and three bits of hand grenade. From the moment when, after

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being carried in, I was presented with a half water-bottle of rum all to myself, I began to enjoy life hugely. But the greatest experience of all was the bowl of mulligatawny soup I received from the hands of the night nurse when I arrived at length in London. The hospital was in the West End. Some of the inmates were not temporary gentlemen, but specimens of the permanent variety and fine specimens too, and the V.A.D.s were young, cheerful and good-looking. There was only one fly in my ointment. The German push had started on the day I landed in England. I was overjoyed to be safe and comfortable here, but I had a sneaking hankering to be back with the boys just when things had got a move on. I could also see now how helpful our raid might have proved if it had been a success, every scrap of evidence as to Jerry's motives being of vast importance just then. I felt I could have done a little better, perhaps, had I only known that raid was not a routine affair. I am one of those children who have to have the 'why' explained to them before they can be induced to perform their song and dance.

My servant who also had been wounded, though only very slightly, just after the raid, managed to get home when the hospitals were cleared to make room for the spate of wounded when Jerry came over. He was soon discharged from hospital. During his subsequent leave he came to see me, sporting two glorious black eyes on his youthful but very, very tough dial.

'Did you get home with a gun-shot wound or did Jim Driscoll (he was in our division) pick on you?' I asked.

Robins grinned bashfully; then he answered in his peculiar piping croak, like a very young frog with a very bad cold, one of the weirdest voices I have ever encountered.

'Not ezactly, Sir. Me ole man give me them, 'e did, fust

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night o' me leaf. But I puts 'im to bed, I doos, an 'e aint come round properly yet.'

Released, myself, on a week's leave before proceeding to the depot, I had an even gaudier time than Robins.

For five months I led a blameless and useless life at a signalling school. One temporary gentleman, also convalescing there from a horrible face wound, employed his spare time in wrenching down and collecting the electric fittings in empty billets. He was an electrician, and his father was an electrician both before (and behind) him. The loot went to swell father's stock in trade every time Sonny went on leave.

There were two captive conscientious objectors at this camp. Both wore sandals and long hair. I was not interested enough to look at them closely. My attitude at that time, both towards their sort and towards rebel Irishmen was one of 'who is not for us, is against us'. After the armistice, though, I found time to examine their sides of the question. Long hair and sandals would seem to point to a swollen exhibitionism as flagrant as that which induced myself and others to enjoy strutting in khaki until all the world and his wife took to doing it. In fact, my glimpse of those two specimens helped me to understand a case which touched me more intimately. This was that of a fellow student at the art school whom I will call Lopes, because he was half Portuguese. Lopes, I heard, died in prison as a 'conchie'. I was sorry to hear this, surprised too at first, for he was a friend of mine. Then, on thinking it over, I found it natural enough, for he was a stubborn lad from the start and inordinately vain of his appearance. He loved dressing up as a cowboy and painting his own reflection in a mirror. But he wore the trappings not only when using himself as a model. He hardly got out of them when at home and even

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in the street he wore a Stetson four-quart hat which he had sent to him direct from U.S.A. Now, how could you get a man like that to wear khaki if he didn't happen to like the look of it? He would have cheerfully gone to his death rather than appear in the streets in a bowler hat, let alone a service cap. Lopes was a wild, free frontiersman of the studios. So he just naturally elected to die in prison rather than risk ruining his own imagined image by putting it to the test in the bull-ring.

In September, a demand came for more reinforcements, so out I went once more to undergo a most miserable time for a few weeks, relieved only by the excitement of going over the top two days running before collecting another Blighty. My Odyssey of discomfort began at the base camp. Things were being done on the cheap. There was not actually any notice up urging officers to clean their own boots but one felt the Government would have been much relieved if we had volunteered to do so, thus disposing of the batman problem for good and all.

At this camp I met another fellow art student. I walked up to him, holding out my hand. He stared blankly. I said, 'You're Palette, aren't you?'

He said, 'I'm not', then, after deliberating a moment, he added, 'But I knew Palette. He's dead now,' and with that he swung on his heel, leaving me with a most empty feeling, for we had been quite good friends. Later I noticed he spoke to no one unless forced to do so. Then I understood. Later still, when I heard of Lopes, I wondered which of these two had chosen the least tragic solution.

I have reserved a former experience for insertion here. This because, in presenting youth's tragedy in another and cruder guise, it both contrasts and dovetails with the Lopes-Palette denouements.

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The morning we took over from the Irish Guards on the Broombeek, the K.R.R.s did a raid on our immediate right. In fact, owing to my casual guide, I had barely got my company settled when the dirt began to fly. Fifteen minutes' pandemonium and we saw them returning with their prisoners. Three days later, I was poking around by myself in the daytime. Approaching a disused pill-box, which I had already satisfied myself contained nothing but a few damaged trench stores, I was startled to hear a movement inside.

'Who's in there?' I said. 'Come out!'

Immediately a most horrible apparition appeared at the doorway. Almost all its face was gone except one eye, and what was left was so swollen that the one sound eye was just a slit. In his hand was a Mill's bomb.

'I'm English,' I said quickly. Then I dodged behind the pillbox for a second, for I wondered if the creature would throw the bomb after all. Nothing happening, I dodged back. The man was still there, so I went up to him, took the bomb out of his hand and found to my relief its pin was still in place. The man was a boy—a K.R.R., one of the raiders. He had been dodging about no-man's land without a face for three days. I got him down the line right away. The fact that he still had enough kick to get to his feet and grab a bomb when I intruded upon his lair still seems a miracle, for he collapsed the moment he knew he was safe in our hands.

The temporary gentlemen at that base camp were even more temporary than ever. There was one horrible draft-conducting officer who epitomized for me once and for all the baseness of base-*embusqués*. He was a gross man with glasses. He soaked whisky all day at the officers' club, holding forth to the callower arrivals on the time that was in store for them. He loved to arouse fear wherever he could

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possibly manage it. He was the school bully of the half-penny comic. Once he held forth for half an hour on end upon an execution for cowardice he said he had witnessed. He gloated so much over his description of the defaulter's corpse, and with such ghoulish relish, that I could not refrain from asking him if that was the only occasion he had ever seen a man killed, other than by accident. He went even redder than usual, changed the subject and affected to never notice my presence again, though I was pleased to note his lowered voice whenever I hove in sight. We were a scratch lot all right at that time. It was a loathsome look-out to imagine oneself being butchered with this crowd, though, of course, here and there, one read a reliable face. The war had gone on too long for decency. Nearly everyone here was either an *embusqué*, or gun-shy from previous pepperings, or else raw from school. I thought of the Ghurkas I had seen early in 'fifteen and I wondered how little of the blood in this camp would not have defiled their knives had we been at war with them.

In these two war chapters I have purposely dwelt on the silly and horrible. I have some more to dispense before I have finished. This, not because I think war between born warriors a regrettable activity. Far from it; provided with a natural arena, undefiled by industrialism, an arena such as the American prairies of the old days, or the Sahara of to-day. I think those who like that sort of thing should be free to enjoy that sort of thing, *ad lib*. But war between minor mechanics, clerks, schoolmasters and spectacled professors who ought to know better is certainly the silliest, ugliest, and most obscene farce that man has yet invented. The gods don't doubt your physical courage, Mr. Everyman. They know they can inflate it at will, to serve their ingenious machinations. What they fear is that some day you will

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grow morally courageous enough to ignore their cozening tricks. Not the formula, 'I'm as good as the next man', delivered in excited tones, but the formula, 'I'm different and I'm going to stay different', pronounced in a cheerful but inflexible voice, is the exorcism that will stump Mars or any other god. Whether such obstinacy in the individual enhances the progress of the race is another matter. The point for the individual to consider is that it brings peace to the soul. Only he who finds himself shall be comfortably lost. Which is the direct anthithesis of the scriptural admonition and therefore rank blasphemy. But so is modern war.

After two weeks, during which no one hoped more devoutly than myself that the rumoured Armistice would materialize, I proceeded up the line and was dumped at a crossroads with instructions to join my unit as they passed on their way into the trenches. The air was humming with fighting planes, the centre of the road had been obliterated by an aerial bomb, and stacked by the side of the crater were the corpses of some half hundred Germans and two Jocks. This was a cheerful beginning. Things had evidently warmed up whilst I had been holidaying. During my wait two members of the Labour Corps came, and started to strip the bodies of their boots and overcoats. They told me this little lot was the bag of one German bomber who had mistaken this column of prisoners for British troops. Mars will have his little jokes . . . with you too, *Herr Jedermann!* How glorious to go to one's Fathers in one's appointed time, confessing, 'I killed fifty of our own bully boys, because I lost my head. Can any berserk among you boast as much?' One can imagine the roar of laughter and the pelting with table scraps with which Valhalla would greet this bungler.

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We moved into the line at once. I saw little of my new unit except my own company. We had Americans on our left—Georgians, and on our right were Frenchmen. The French attacked St. Quentin on the second day and we could watch the battle quite plainly. It was like a private film show. During the afternoon we got a plastering with gas shells and some of my lads lost their voices, for they had had only six weeks' training in all, and hardly seemed to have the gumption to clean their rifles, let alone pop into a gas mask in a hurry. The gas caught me unawares too, for I also, in spite of my four years' practice, was still no soldier. Soldiers, like poets, are born, not made. Synthetic soldiers, like synthetic poets, are a weariness and a waste of time. The world has already tumbled to this fact concerning poets. It starves them and kills them by silence after they are dead. But it goes on feeding its synthetic soldiers quite cheerfully, for which I am really more grateful than I sound in this chapter, for here I am back in the disgust which overwhelmed me during my last few days in the line. I am trying to recreate my attitude.

So I swallowed a small bellyful of gas before I got out my mask. It was too late then. I was coughing and retching too violently to fix it on. I don't know how I escaped swallowing any more, but apparently I did. After retching to the point of exhaustion, I began to feel a bit better, well enough to take a good swig of whisky anyway. A few moments later I was surprised to find myself recovering fast, and I soon felt quite all right. All the same, I had not got off quite so lightly as I thought at the time. The effects were to return three weeks later. Why I was granted this respite is a marvel, but it is a fact.

Back of the sunken road we occupied were two abandoned tanks literally smothered in corpses, for there were even

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bodies on their roofs. Hunting among these for field-glasses and revolvers I came on a most revolting sight. Some enthusiast had battered one German head flat with a rifle butt. The corpse was lying on its back, the face now all puffed up and swollen out again like a broad hassock, the handles of which were the ears. This sight set my chidlings crawling just like an independent being inside me. The sin against the Holy Ghost again! That loathsome gloating feeling at the penitentiary triangle revived for a second in my vitals, by association of ideas perhaps. Or was there some atavistic monster inside me that took glee in such sights, thereby arousing the rest of my personality to unutterable loathing of itself? Does each one of us carry a ghoul batted under hatches? Or am I, who hate cruelty so passionately, an unfortunate exception?

That night the O.C. Company took the sergeant-major with him to the Batt. H.Q. for secret orders. They kept the orders secret all right, for both of them came back too fuddled to explain clearly what was the scheme of attack for the morrow. An hour or so later we moved forward into position. I had only a sketchy idea of what was expected of me, and, to crown everything, I found my watch had stopped a few seconds after zero. We were now moving forward behind the usual Brock's display, which is quite a pretty thing to watch unless you get so interested that you walk into it, which is just what my raw boys were doing. I had the greatest difficulty in keeping them back. Just before the final jump of the barrage, the C.S.M. came running to me and bellowed out that the O.C. Company and one platoon officer had both been killed by a 'short'. That left myself, a girl-faced youth fresh from Camberley, and the C.S.M. to carry on with the company. So off we went and whipped up our team into a ferocious charge upon a handful of yellow-faced, shivering

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Germans no older than our own school-kids. Up went their hands and my young devils promptly called off the war to go through their pockets. There being no barrage now to drown my voice, I soon put a stop to these kindergarten tricks, and we resumed our stroll, my schoolboy buccaneers shooting at all Germans impartially, those still uncertain what to do, and those with their hands already up. We took several little parties of prisoners. Then there came a time when we were held up by a determined machine-gunner. Both my Lewis guns, which had a right to reply, being suspiciously silent, I got up and ran towards the nearest. As I ran, I got a kick on the hip that knocked me over. Finding I could still use my leg, I raced the rest of the way and flopped down by the gun, to find its team lying on their backs smoking Woodbines. The gun had jammed, and here was an excuse for a holiday. Cursing them roundly I got it going again, fired a round or two at the sunken road wherein was the machine gun, and told them to keep it sprayed whilst I ran on to see what was the matter with the other section. This they did so half-heartedly that Jerry got another snap at me. This time the bullet went through the shoulder of a lad lying in front of me and skidded round my shin on the same leg that had collected the first. Over I went again, but still found I could limp along, so I reached the second Lewis gun and got that going also. Previously, I had sent back a runner with a plea for help from the tanks, for I knew we had some with us. These now appeared and waddled down upon that sunken road. Two Germans appeared simultaneously and raced to meet them, flopping down into craters in their path. My Lewis gunners had apparently gone into a trance again. As the tanks passed these two men, each rose with a bundle of stick bombs in his hand, to hurl at the gun emplacement

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of the tank nearest him. We got them both, but too late to stop the damage. The concussions had exploded the ammunition in both tanks. Jerry now left in a hurry. We could see a head every now and then bobbing down the sunken road, so I waved my boys to their feet once more, and we trotted forward to find a few wounded Germans left and the Americans on our left already pouring down to meet us. They had gone over the top in column of lumps. There was no sign of anyone at all on our right, so I sent a section out to get in touch, for I had only the vaguest idea of our objective. They wandered about for quite an hour, and then sent a runner back to say they were held up by a machine-gun and still out of touch. The machine-gun was no myth. It was enfilading our road, on the other side of which a German boy kept moaning for a drink. I flung him my flask. He took a swig at it, and then died before he could throw it back, so I had to fetch it. The machine-gunner saw me and popped off, and I got another clout at that moment, quite a gentle one though, as if someone had tapped me on the shoulder. I retrieved my flask, found it unspilt by a miracle, got under cover and examined my shoulder. A large thin slice of metal was hanging from my shoulder strap. So it was not the machine-gunner who had touched me after all, but a long strip of whizzbang. Having time now to examine the other marks made by the bullets I found they were only scratches, though each had hurt like the kick of a mule and was still sore. The second bullet had scored a ring round my shin and was still embedded in the puttee at the back of my calf.

The Sandhurst boy now showed up. I asked him where the devil his two platoons had got to. He had a very vague idea. He was supposed to be on my right, but had got his people strung out at right angles to mine. The section I had

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sent had missed his two platoons, passing in front of them. As he would have to go back to get his men moved up, I suggested he should take back with him the few prisoners we had taken on the road. One being a fine type of N.C.O. wearing an iron cross of some sort, he welcomed the chance to practise his German on this fellow, and they got so interested in one another, they had to be reminded of the business in hand.

That night we were kept digging and got no sleep. About dawn, there was an order to retire about half a mile, as the terrain was to be reswept by a barrage. That order never reached me. If I hadn't discovered that we were short of shovels, a circumstance which forced me to go back to the sunken road to get more, for I couldn't trust these boys not to get lost in the dark, we should have been treated to a plastering from our own guns. I found the road already deserted but for one corporal who had come back for something or other. Getting the strength of things from him, I rushed back to my men and, though it was pitch dark still, managed to collect all but my servant, who had disappeared in search of fuel to boil me a mess of tea. I never saw him again, but I got the rest back at the double just before the barrage descended.

Following it up for a mile or so, we were held up just outside Bohain, one machine-gun being particularly offensive. In endeavouring to collect volunteers to outflank this obstacle I suddenly felt a violent kick, seemingly in the stomach, for it knocked the wind clean out of me. As I fell, I noticed a German squatting, holding a rifle, about three hundred yards away. He at any rate was a fair shot — not quite a bull but a darned good inner — the bullet had missed my heart by a bare inch, to perform a parabolic tour downwards through my diaphragm, for I had been leaning forward when

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it struck me. Not a bad bit of work for one bullet. All I knew at the time was that I couldn't get my breath. It was just like being kicked in the guts at football. I fell and rolled down the steps of a dugout, fainting on the way. I can remember the dream I had yet. I thought I was falling out of a seaplane, rushing first through icy air, then through icy, bottle-green water with the bubbles rushing upward past my eyes. All the time the water was pressing on my lungs like an iron hoop. I struggled hard to breathe, to force this chill pall from my breast — and I succeeded. I woke to find the blood welling out of my chest — but I could breathe now and could even feel the air whistling in at the hole in my ribs. Someone who had noticed me fall was with me almost immediately, applied a dressing and made me comfortable with commendable speed. That night they got me down to a hospital where a wonderful red-haired night nurse saved my life by sewing me up just as I had coughed myself open and started a haemorrhage. There were Americans, Frenchmen, German prisoners and civilians, including women, all in one huge marquee. The red-haired nurse told me that on her last day off she had got one of the doctors to take her up the line, although it was against the rules. I thought it was a most peculiar way to spend a day off, but she seemed to have enjoyed it. In the bed opposite me was a man who had been at school with Alec Waugh.

Into the hospital train was admitted a *poilu* at a wayside station. He walked in, divested himself of his kit, and lay down in the bunk beneath me. In a few minutes he started to rave, jumped up and rushed about the corridor, shouting, '*On les aura! On les aura!*' The orderlies got him to bed again, where he lay muttering incoherently. Then he started to sing the 'Marseillaise' in a weak voice. The song broke off in a rattling gasp. He was dead. Pneumonia and pleurisy.

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He was a patriot, that tall bearded peasant, and his national anthem helped him to die gloriously, even here behind the line. We English are patriots, too, but it is hard to imagine one of us singing himself to sleep with 'God Save the King' or 'Rule Britannia'. There is no other tune in the anthology of the world so passionately heroic as the 'Marseillaise'. It would rouse a riddled corpse to regasp his rifle. The Red Indian has his death song, which is given him by his 'helper', his guardian spirit. The Frenchman has his 'Marseillaise', which is given him by his national spirit. To die singing, when granted time to sing, is to prove oneself in harmony with the Spheres. Yes, there is beauty in war, piercing beauty, but it is far rarer than the earthy beauties of peace.

From Rouen, I proceeded, still on my back, to Bristol, Southmead, where they had a perverse habit of keeping all the windows open day and night to admit the filthy fogs. The man on my immediate left had the most appalling wound I have ever seen. He had been sliced right down the spine from shoulders to buttocks. I reckoned I had got off well. They didn't even have to drain my lung. In another week I felt well enough to tackle a cigarette. It made me cough. To my surprise I could not stop coughing. The spasm lasted until I was exhausted. I have had that cough ever since, save for a month or two's entire freedom at times. Mostly it has stayed with me in just the form it took that day I swallowed the small bellyfull of gas. I get at least one spasm in the twenty-four hours, usually about dawn. Otherwise I am not much the worse, except when some indiscretion induces a relapse, and then the spasms may number nine or ten a day. By 'indiscretion', I imply not only dissipation but the most ordinary and sometimes unavoidable misadventures such as getting overtired or wet through. But occasionally I get so fit that I am tempted to behave like a normal man, and

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always I give way to that temptation, sometimes keeping up the bluff for quite a considerable period. This hang-over has naturally affected my way of life ever since. It has also gained me a very good pension by way of compensation for restricted activity.

I had got quite used to weeping by now. I wept when I found my father out of his mind. I wept when I ended my affair with Lily. I wept when my brother was reported killed, and again when that report was contradicted. I wept when that Frenchman passed out singing. Once again I dissolved into tears. This was when the bells rang out at eleven of the clock on that eleventh day of the eleventh month.

Those who know that asthma is a nervous disease will perhaps see some connection between this cough of mine and that fit of weeping. After some meditation I have come to the conclusion that my nervous system, keyed up by four years of tension, seized on my slight gassing as material out of which to build itself a substitute for that external tension to which it had become accustomed. In other words, it refuses to forget the War. As an endorsement to this theory, I have noticed that external irritants, such as deep grief or disappointment, if severe enough, seem to dissipate this cough of mine while their shadows envelop me. In effect, my life, since the Armistice, has been one long war with neurosis. The remainder of this autobiography will strive to show the fluctuations of this subsequent and purely personal war in which I have found myself engaged ever since.

CHAPTER XII

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I SPENT Peace Day on the River Dart with my old friend Brian, whom the tide of war had washed back into my circle after a silence of many years. Neither of us had grown much wiser from a worldly stance. We still found one of the highest satisfactions in life was to turn ourselves into imitation tramps. Lying in a field with Brian, overlooking the creek at Fowey, I read the *Mayor of Troy* in its own setting — another highly successful addition to my Golden Treasury of Circumstantial Readings.

Sailing in a dinghy to Polperro, we found that village groaning under a plague of artists, in the rough ratio of two painters to every fisherman. Here, moreover, quite by chance, we met an old gentleman with a much-lined but still handsome countenance in which the vivid voluptuous lips retained their avid youthful zest. He had known many famous men, including Oscar Wilde, whom he venerated above them all. Brian and I were still too crudely educated to share the enthusiasm which this lush-lipped satyr of the Forest Beautiful strove to impart to us on that memorable evening when he made us free of his library. This was my first introduction to 'curious' books in de luxe editions.

I now set out to embrace England as I had formerly steeped myself in Western Canada: that is, on the 'earn while you learn' system, for I was now reduced to subsistence on my pension; my wound gratuities, and the few hundreds my father had left me, having been rapidly dissipated in unwise speculations. This 'unskilled labourer' method of seeing the

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world is a mistake under modern conditions. The man who has the patience to follow a narrow course till he has acquired a thorough grounding in some profession sees most in the long run and is not so liable as the hobo to waste his health on trivialities. I knew this now, but it was too late to pull up. So I remained the vagabond poetaster.

I love England. With far purer motives than those of William the Bastard, I could sprawl and kiss her soil on returning from lands where there is always something missing. But one of the familiar conditions, happily rare in newer countries, which we all would gladly dispense with in the Motherland, is poverty.

Coming one night from a reading of Masfield's *Everlasting Mercy* at the Poetry Bookshop, and taking in Leicester Square in the stroll back to our digs, Brian and I noted the crowds pouring from the theatres, where no doubt many had been enjoying a good vicarious weep over the misfortunes of the betrayed heroine, tramping the snowy streets with her disowned 'chee-ild', or the equivalent of that distressing situation as translated into modern sophistications. About the escaped theatre-goers, in the gutter, hovered the haggard, unkempt originals of those very unfortunates to whose presentation in strutting effigy the good folks had just been according their temporarily unleashed sympathy. That sympathy was all too obviously well and truly under hatches again, and these poor originals stood there entirely unheeded while the crowd rushed off to its restaurants or its suburban trains. Suddenly there erupted, barging through this medley of luxury and want, a wild figure, striding out savagely, muttering hoarse curses, an out-of-work navvy by the looks of him, Saul Kane, himself, like as not, stepped right out of Masfield's poem and drunk enough to be nasty — not expensively nor swinishly drunk, possibly one chance-come

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beer on an empty stomach. The gaunt apparition's eyes blazed balefully as he passed us, hissing imprecations at the richest city in Christendom. Undoubtedly Kane was heading for a night in the cooler.

That is the sort of thing which tempers my love for England. Encountering similar sights overseas, perhaps because the contrast is never so remarkable, I am not nearly so deeply affected. Yet in fairness to the London burgher, perhaps I should mention here a parallel incident from Edmonton, Alberta, about six months before the War.

It was a cool, crisp morning, say, thirty below zero. Having a good breakfast inside me, I was able to enjoy that crispness as I strolled the streets. Just opposite the doors of a palatial hotel there lurked on the sidewalk a scarecrow who had evidently not enjoyed a breakfast substantial enough to temper the crispness of the morning. To him it was obviously as cold as charity. Just as I drew abreast, out of those palatial revolving doors tripped a plump cheerily energetic figure muffled to the eyes in furs, from a gap in which protruded a fragrant cigar. As this plutocrat proceeded to don yet another sumptuous wrapping — nothing less than a beautifully upholstered and breeze-proof coup    car, the shivering scarecrow thawed the icicles from its whiskers with a trembling hand in order to whine:

'It's a perishing cold morning, Mister!'

'So they tell me! So they tell me!' beamed the cheery one as he climbed into his rubber-shod mansion and stepped on the starter.

A cynical rascal that! But I had to admire his flair for the *mot juste*.

That Leicester Square incident bore bitter fruit in me, which, when published in Australia years later, earned a brief notoriety. As I have repeatedly claimed to be a

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wandering gleeman, I make bold to offer it here as a sample
of my muse in her Villonesque moments.

‘ . . . WHILE OF UNSOUND MIND’
In all humility I go,
My vehicle a humble rope.
Small choice has Lazarus, you know,
Of paths beyond his pockets’ scope.
Besides this rope is symbol fit
Of the dog’s life that I have seen . . .
Clean docked the nether end of it,
However snarled the bight between.
God knows what waits for me beyond.
God knows the little that I care.
Sleep or the mystic’s vision fond . . .
God knows it can’t be meaner there!
We gazed not eye to eye, my friends,
Towards the goals we deemed worth while,
But bitterness no lesion mends
And death has little use for bile,
Wherefore my mourners all I greet
In soldier style, before I go . . .
See, to my ragged trousers’ seat,
I’ve pinned . . . a sprig of mistletoe!

What our costive civilization needs is a play that should
make the audience surge from its seats and rush to the exits
to empty its pockets into the gutter, before the children of
night and starvation which haunt the dark narrow ways
which seem the inevitable environs of any theatre. Only the
managers would not stage such a play, even supposing one
could discover it. For that would be to dabble in funda-
mental magic, and fundamental magic is not good for sober

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business. All our modern plays are surface magic, *saltimbanqueries*.

I delivered bread for a country bakery by car and by motor cycle, the latter being used to reach the outlying cottages in the woods. I swam in the lakes and pools to be found in those woods, for this was a district of big estates. I indulged in tradesboy flirtations with the cottagers' wives and daughters and the maids in the big houses. I was a guest in boffeyes, gamekeepers' cottages, charcoal burners' huts, farm kitchens and pub parlours. There was always a cup of tea or a glass of beer for the baker. I played darts, whist, and shove-'apenny in the pubs, and bowls on their lawns. I saw to it that the tramps got the very stale bread, for that is the usual custom with country bakers. So long as they do not descend on him in overwhelming droves, the baker is generous to these waifs of the roads who warm their numbed limbs on chilly mornings against the walls of his bakehouse. I heard all the gossip of the countryside, and re-dispensed it with pride and gusto. I knew everyone of humble station, and not a few of the gentry. I got that composite picture of the internal economy of households which is only vouchsafed to the tradesman's roundsman. When the parson calls, he is treated to mummary. I knew a whole lot more about the parish than the parson did. I was welcome at some houses where his cloth was anathema and his spiritual bread at a discount. All this was another chapter in my education, a gross, Elizabethan chapter. I shed more quills. I learned to tolerate without instinctive loathing even the idiot children who, though not exactly a general feature of the countryside, are sufficiently common to guarantee the presence of two or three to the parish. In the woods, I came on the modern poacher who uses a sidecar for transporting his questionable

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wares to a safer market in a distant town. On the commons I talked with gipsies who also travel by petrol, and with tinkers who still do not. I heard the real opinion of the cottagers about the Morris Dances and the Jack in the Green fêtes reintroduced by the local gentry. I got into trouble for forgetting cakes ordered for old maids' cats. They had to have just the sort their mistresses knew they fancied best. I had to remember whom to congratulate on recent weddings and births, and whom to condole with over funerals. The coin was always two-sided. Even on the most placid families, sorrow would descend suddenly like a thief in the night, and I would roll up with my cheery 'Ba-a-a-aker!' to find listless greetings and preoccupied minds. Kipling has pointed out that the countryside belongs not to the Squire but to old Hodgson. I may add that the gardens of the big houses belong to the gardeners who are their sole occupants for long periods, the houses to the housekeepers, and the horses to the stablemen. To the users, the tools!

One visit I paid once a week always filled me with dread. I took loaves to one gamekeeper who lived in the gloomiest tract of woodland in the neighbourhood. The house was dark, and the windows were always shut. A small moon-faced boy, who looked three-quarters head and one-quarter spectacles, was usually playing in the garden. He had a pretty, fragile, little sister, who was sometimes also at play, but more often working indoors. They were orphans, the children of a widowed daughter in London who had died that year. As one approached the house one became aware of a stony stare appraising one from the gloom within. Sometimes the eyes gleamed bravely, more often almost malevolently, according to the mood lurking behind them; and that mood depended on the degree of suffering the invalid was enduring at the moment: for the gamekeeper,

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once a powerful man, was dying of a painful cancer that confined his tall raw-boned body to a chair and had bleached the once tanned skin to a parchment yellow. This cancer seemed to envelop not only his wracked frame in its malignant grasp, but to reach out and clutch at those pasty-faced children, at the patient wife who waited on the invalid, at the walls of the cottage, at the gloomy azalea shrubs hedging it from the woodland, even at myself, the visitor, fumbling desperately for a greeting that should be neither imperintently cheerful nor callously depressing. I had long since conquered my fear of diseases and I had read that cancer is not transferable. It was not that which appalled me. Rather the whole dismal setting of this remote tragedy conspired to suggest the all-conquering march of some dim and dread fatality.

"E's that cantankerous at times," said the woman in a low voice, almost every time I called, and with monotonous poverty of expression.

I put myself in the place of those orphan children when granfer was in his tantrums and granny forbade even the quietest game so as to spare his nerves as much as possible. In a sort of frozen compassion I shared the trials of that unnatural-looking imp and his puny sister.

Another creeping horror in my Arcadia was the spread of the week-end cottage cult, a feature resulting in the evacuation of aged couples to the workhouse, so that the picturesque thatched cottages they had been born under, or that one of them had been born under and which had housed the brood of children now fledged and flown, might be renovated into fake antiquity plus modern sanitation and let to week-ending stockbrokers or rustivating literary men from London. One showery morning, driving past a common, I actually found an old couple, customers of mine, camped in the open beside

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their miserable stack of furniture, which had been soaked by the rain. They had been evacuated good and early that morning, for they had ignored every notice to quit, and the landlord had had quite enough of their nonsense. They were not behind with the rent. The old woman was crying. The old man was cursing. I promised to see if the vicar could help them. The old man warned me it would be a waste of my time. He was right. The vicar thought the ancients would be better cared for in the almshouses, even if they did hate the idea of being separated and forced into separate institutions. Male and female created He them, and male and female were the institutions, so what else could they expect! The idea of organized charity held a glamour for the good man, a glamour non-apparent to those who have no choice but to accept it. He was a sporting parson and a hard, hard nut. His wife was even harder. The poor did not exist as human beings in her philosophy. The baker's roundsman did not exist either, except as that 'blue-eyed angel with the socialistic ideas', an observation that was retailed to me through that ever-open channel, the servants' quarters.

Of course, the good lady was right, I was a sort of angel, I admit, an emissary of Demeter, dispensing her gifts throughout the countryside, a visitant demi-semi-god shod with lightning and Perdriau tyres, ever willing to accept cups of tea, glasses of beer, or even more intimate votive offerings from those female hinds adjudged by me worthy so to serve the goddess. With the best will in the world I could not have forced myself to include the vicars wife among these select handmaidens.

All the time I was trying to butt into London journalism. I had tried living in the Metropolis, so as to get to know people who might be of use to me. It was no good. As I could not stand more than two weeks of London, even in

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the finest weather, without experiencing a relapse bad enough to send me to hospital, this scheme was rather at a discount. I did, however, get to know one or two smaller fry in the editorial chairs, one of whom has since spread his wings into a more amenable sphere, I am pleased to record. Thus I was able to sell a few articles and stories (chiefly fairy tales for children's annuals). The latter publications also accepted a few drawings, but many more got lost or damaged in transit, so that I came to the inevitable conclusion that the dispatching of MSS. was a much less risky game. The layman does not realize the disadvantages to be met, and the difficulties to be overcome, by the free-lance magazine illustrator. Botched MSS. can be re-typed automatically, but one can only pull a drawing about within certain limits. Exceed them, and the whole thing has to be re-drawn, which takes just as much time and energy as did the production of the original, stale energy too, for one has by then lost interest.

Penny dreadfuls also came within my scope. One guinea per thousand words. Not bad pay if one could be sure of a regular market. I could not. Moreover, plots suspiciously like my rejected matter met my eye from time to time. These were probably coincidences, yet they were none the less disheartening for that.

At this period, I was able to pay for typing. My typist was the widow of a philologist who, as she informed me, had assisted in the compilation of the Oxford Dictionary. He had been an authority on Red Indian languages, but apparently not a great authority, for he had left nothing more than a few papers comparing the tongues of certain tribes. It struck me as strange that one so interested in American glossaries should never have troubled to visit America. All his learning had been at second hand and, no

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doubt, others had used his pamphlets at third hand. His widow was good enough to lend me books from her queerly assorted but undeniably interesting library. Among the stacks of dictionaries, grammars, and bound volumes of *Notes and Queries* — the last undoubtedly the directest clue to her husband's personality — were several works on folklore and magic.

I one day found a man browsing among these, whose countenance was so tough he looked entirely out of place in such surroundings. Later he told me the same comment had occurred to him when he took his first look at me. This man was a seaman and a poet. I will call him Buchanan.

Buchanan had met Conrad, and had received a letter from Masfield which I perused with due reverence. During the war he had commanded a fleet of mine-sweepers. He was now skippering a tramp steamer, but was uncertain of his job. In fact, he lost it a few months after our first meeting. His trouble was beer. My new friend loved the sea with a passionate love, which caused him to cover yards of paper with blank verse, the language of which was so technical as to preclude landlubber appreciation. It was not written for landlubbers. He despised the breed as a man of the wide open western spaces despises the feeble cits of the effete East. Unlike successful writers of Western yarns, he could not, and would not, temper the raw, real thing to the shorthorn intelligence. So he remained unregenerate and unappreciated, save in *Blue Peter* and the *Nautical Magazine*. When he descended to prose these two productions received him with open arms. Yet he did not like descending to prose. He preferred his brass-bound Pegasus.

Have you ever got up into the bows of a ship and there lain exulting in the sting of the salt in your nostrils and in the sight of the triumphant thrust of the nose through the creaming

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crests? Buchanan's best lines had a similar magic once you had had them explained to you, and, even before you understood them, your ear was captivated by the surge of the sea and the singing of the gale in the shrouds. They were also cursed with similar limitations. The first rapture palled after a while. You looked for some relief from the elements, some shelter. None was there. Unless you shared Buchanan's elemental nature, unless you were keyed for an eternal thrust into the eye of the wind, they exhausted and chilled before long.

This poet had lived tragically. He had been shipwrecked, and he, himself, had been responsible for yet another shipwreck. The War had given him another chance, together with a mention in dispatches, a renewed lease of which peace was now seeking to rob him on the score of advanced age. His father had been lost at sea, in the maiden trip of a barque which had been converted to steam. He hated steam as he hated the landlubber. For him, Neptune was the symbol of all that his soul held sacred, as was Pan for mine.

Buchanan also hated his fellow sailors, and scowled heavily upon the cumbersome smutty stories with which his first officer sought to entertain me when I visited them aboard their tramp. He found sailors petty gossips and lost souls given to trivial interests incompatible with their glorious calling. He did not deal in gossip himself, except in so far as to point out that the defects of his immediate shipmates were entirely in accord with the general make-up of the genus nautical. And, having noticed a like insensibility to the larger issues among prospectors and cattlemen, I understood his point of view perfectly. All the same, I held in reserve an opinion, unadmitted, openly at any rate, by him, that reliability in an awkward situation is worth a

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whole lot more to the human race than aesthetic sensibility. It is only the passenger who can afford to steep his soul in the sunset, and passengers are a luxury while our sea is studded with yet uncharted reefs.

Poor Buchanan was one of Service's 'men who won't fit in'. Tragedy had marked him for her own. He received a knock-down blow soon after he lost his job, just as soon after, in fact, as it took him to go flat broke. For his wife chose just that moment to die in child-birth, and Buchanan blamed his own intemperate ways for her death.

'Had I only saved a bit, I might have been able to feed her properly when she needed extras.' So he wrote to me when begging my presence at her funeral so that he should 'have one friend among the cursed cloud of relatives who have threatened to descend on me to interfere now it is too late'.

I got there twenty-four hours ahead of the cloud. Neighbours were looking after the baby. Buchanan was alone in the house with his dead. He took me up to see her where she lay in an upper room. Then I went out and drank myself into a slightly less bleak sobriety. Buchanan would touch nothing in his remorse.

He spent that night on his knees beside his dead woman, whilst I tried to sleep, and then to read, in the next room, for he would not have me in there with them. All through the night he talked to her, pleading for some sign of forgiveness. Just after dawn there came silence for the first time. I tip-toed to the door and peered in. He was asleep beside her. Soon after sun-up he was awake again. I heard the bed creak. Then his footsteps. He was pacing the room. Then he came downstairs to me in the kitchen where I was making tea. I turned to greet him, and saw his face was alight with a fierce ecstasy.

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‘She has come back. She is up there now’, he said. Involuntarily I strained my ears, and my nape bristled. I remembered that creaking bed. Buchanan did not notice my absurd and childish fear, but went on: ‘She has forgiven me. She will always stay with me. My darling promised me that.’

Thereafter I was afraid to go near that room during the remainder of my stay, for there was such conviction in his voice that I was sure he was right and, unpurified myself by sorrow, I felt my presence would be an offence, I, who, so far as she was concerned, was merely one of the war-wrecks with whom her husband had soaked away his substance.

My irrational superstition — irrational, I hold, because it ignored the unlikelihood of a spirit being confined to one room, not because it admitted the possibility of her being able to return upon some plane to which Buchanan alone and solely through the agency of his passion, had access — received strange confirmation the day after the funeral.

The relatives were now all gone, save two women, one the dead woman’s sister, one the sister of my friend. The latter was fairly well-off. She had offered to care for the child. The dead woman had expressed a wish that her own sister, who was very poor, should take it. Buchanan had ignored his wife’s wishes because — surely with justification — he was now afraid of poverty. He wanted the child to have the best chance. He wanted her to be given an education. His dead wife’s sister, a weak, butterfly sort of person, whilst sentimentally inclined to take up the burden, was perhaps relieved at this chance to relinquish it.

‘I know that the baby will enter a house where love is a stranger,’ Buchanan told me. ‘But I’m thinking about her future. They have a strong family sense and will do their duty by her because she is a Buchanan.’

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The weather was gloomy. At the funeral the rain had poured down in sheets. The following afternoon it was still raining, and the house, never well lighted, was itself as dark as a tomb. There was a shortage of electric light bulbs, and no one had thought to run out for more.

Buchanan's dour sister was up in the dead woman's room, looking over her few poor effects to see if anything could be converted for the use of the child. We others were sitting by a fire in the dining-room.

Suddenly we heard a scuffling fall and a scream. Rushing up the first flight, we found Buchanan's sister, tumbled half-way down the top flight, and now sitting on the stairs nursing her ankle. The dour, big-boned woman was sobbing, a fact which shocked me strangely, for somehow I had never connected her with any display of emotion.

'How did you manage it, Jean?' asked my friend as he supported her downstairs.

'I was pushed,' she sobbed. 'I felt her push me. She will have none of me.' And she glanced fearfully over her shoulder at the door while she spoke. Our eyes instinctively followed hers, for not one of us thought this confession unnatural. Of course, there was nothing unusual to be seen.

So then we held a council by the fire in the sitting-room, I, saying very little, but with my spine yet a-tingle, so deeply was I affected by this confirmation of my own primitive superstitious fears. Both Buchanan and his sister seemed to accept the sign unquestioningly. The other woman was just miserable. She sat there snuffling, in a weak, helpless way.

'My dear one said she would guide me,' my friend reminded his sister. 'She meant that for a signal, Jean. She wishes you no further harm. The girl shall go with Dorothy, till she is old enough to come to me, and by then, please God, I shall have got a job and been able to save a bit for her.'

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After I had left that house the affair seemed incredible enough. Yet, confronted by those strong, dour faces, I shared their belief. It seemed quite natural and in keeping with their natures. That a disembodied hand can push a solid object my reason still refused to credit, yet I was just as sure that Buchanan's sister was conscious of some extraneous impulse when she fell. A sudden wave of panic might have quickened her step and made it falter on the stair. But that does not explain the matter entirely. For the secrets of the emotional body are still largely a matter of conjecture, and who can prove that panic has always a subjective cause?

After another bad bout of coughing, followed by a spell in hospital, I concluded fresh air was necessary, so I took to the roads once more, this time by myself, for Brian had gone abroad again. I remained on tramp for nearly a year. My pension, of course, lifted me out of the ranks of compulsory vagrancy, but the life I led sometimes approached the real thing with sufficient fidelity. As a rule, however, I travelled well enough provided, for I made a practice of carrying sufficient camp gear to ensure comfort. I would move from four to eight miles a day, making two trips so as to transport all my swag. Essentials only went with me on the first trip, as I liked to travel light when choosing a camp. Having picked a place, I would hide my gear under dead leaves and return for the remainder. On the return trip, smoke now being in evidence from cottage chimneys, I would try to cadge a breakfast. The good people did not know I had blankets and a larder of my own hidden under a neighbouring hedge. I was rarely repulsed, especially as I was always eager to do any little job that they might suggest in exchange for a meal. With a full belly and a purring pipe I would then go back to my last night's camp, unearth my books, cooking

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utensils, and spare blanket, and convey them to the new camp by devious ways out of sight of the labourers. Time and again I had to wait until some person moved away, in order to unearth my gear in safety. Never did anyone discover it. Other tramps, coming on me when in camp, were sometimes a nuisance, but I always got up too early in the morning for them to keep track of me. Even when I left part of the gear for a week at a time, no one ever found it, and this is not very extraordinary. Most people, with the exception of tramps, are not interested in hedgerows, except for blackberrying or bird-nesting. Roman-British pottery is lying under four inches of leaves in one place I know of, not even buried in the earth. The fragments are of little interest, being coarse and badly damaged. Even thus I might bury a tin billy in the fallen leaves of a coppice and, returning in a few hundred years, find its rusted rivets just where I had left it.

In West Australia I was later to hear of an interesting case of which the foregoing reminds me. A Swede sundowner left his swag in a clump of bush by the side of a track and went off to the neighbouring town, intending to return. Leaving in a hurry for some reason he had no time to go back for it. Six months later, having drifted back that way, he went out along that road and met a policeman carrying a weather-stained swag across his saddle. It looked like his own abandoned bundle of nap. Half jokingly he said: 'Say, Mister, that looks like my swag.'

The policeman replied: 'Then you're the man I want to have a talk with. A man was murdered on that farm over there last night. I came out this morning to investigate and found this swag near the track opposite the farm gate.'

It was the Swede's own nap all right, just as it had been left.

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Speaking, as I did just now, of Roman-British pottery, I am reminded of another discovery. Noticing oyster shells sticking out of a cliff, I was inquisitive enough to climb and investigate. Whereupon, as a result of two days' digging, I unearthed from a kitchen midden, copper coins of Tetricus, Posthumus and Claudius Gothicus, together with a bronze cross-bow brooch, hollow bones containing fards, and bones scored with tallies. There were also pottery fragments of half a dozen makes, one being the base of a red Samian-ware vessel which bore the trade mark EPPILLUM. The coins and brooch I took to the British Museum. Handing them in for identification, I was left a short while in a waiting-room and then shown into the coin experts' room. The very first thing they said to me was: 'These aren't worth anything, you know.'

Stroking my nose to see if it had acquired overnight what Aldous Huxley calls 'an oriental convolute', I said I was sorry to hear that, but not heartbroken. I had not called to sell them anything — merely to learn whose superscriptions these pennies bore. After that the expert became, if not exactly 'matey', at least mollified.

'We get a lot brought in,' he said. 'Nearly everyone comes with the idea of selling us something.'

The expert was a tall handsome young man. Secretly, I envied him both for his looks and his position — but not for his manners. The clue to his, which is apparently a typical, attitude towards unaccredited strangers, is to be found, I think, in the fact that, while scientists are aware that the average white man is a depigmented savage, the average white man is not. Nevertheless, the average white man's manners, though they may not attain to the standard of those of the Arab, the Gaucho, the Igorot, and other fortunates who have not yet been deprived of their offensive weapons, their gods, and their gravity, are considerably finer than those

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of many of our eminent men. I have noticed, for instance, that the ordinary scrub politician has better manners than the statesman, and the medical student than the specialist, while the despised shop assistant, the counter-jumper, can give us all points in this direction. Probably the slaves in ancient civilizations were also the repository of decent social instincts. Apparently, the rarer the chiller; and this, of course, is inevitable, since one cannot expect a precise and delicate instrument to dip its indicator to every chance inspector. All the same it is a pity.

Later I took all my finds and presented them to the museum of their local county town. The curator here also ran true to vocational type. He seemed quite annoyed that any layman should have the impertinence to go rummaging in British soil, which should be sacred to archaeologists. Even when I assured him I had dug over every inch with my penknife and fingernails, he seemed disposed to suspect I must have ruined something or other. I gave him the bearings of my find and left it at that. By the way, it was a layman who informed me, through the correspondence page of the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, that, with my EPPILLUM, I had added a fresh name to the recorded list of Samian ware factories.

I camped in Chanctonbury Ring that New Year's Eve, for I wished to throw myself open to its influence. No immediate response was vouchsafed to my invitation. Midsummer's Eve still saw me on the Downs, not so far away, but I had travelled a fair distance in between. I read *As You Like It* that afternoon in my camp, snug in the centre of a thicket of gorse, with one blackthorn in the middle by way of a roof. And I went to bed in a fine ecstasy to dream that a blackbird came to me and said: 'I have a present for you. To-morrow when you wake, you shall find it!'

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I woke at dawn and lay on my back, considering this dream. Something wet dropped on my face, splashing my lips. Scandalized, I thought for a moment my blackbird had been treating me to a practical joke. Such a Rabelaisian debacle would be quite in accord with the sardonic humour of certain powers. But I had wronged them. What fell on my lips was a gobbet of cuckoo-spit. I took it as a sign of acceptance into the fold. A prelude to what? I did not know, but I was aware of a deep content.

The following winter, I abandoned the roads, or rather the sheep-tracks, to attend an art school. It was time for a change. I had always been sensitive to the periodic need for an alteration of rhythm; through the mode of life I had adopted, whatever its drawbacks, I was held by no insurmountable fences to any stale track. For, as one day I felt impelled to record in doggerel:

This golden rule has stood me by
Whilst others sucked their orange dry,
And kept my heart as green as peas
All over Boredom's seven seas.
When heart or liver's run to seed
A change of diet's what you need,
Just scour 'em out with greener feed!
To virgin paddocks drift 'em!
The Hesperides lie always
Beyond the skyline several days:
But men can always lift 'em
Whenever they've a mind to sail
Away from proven cakes and ale . . .
The trouble is to shift 'em:
For men grow old and life grows stale
As stagnant water in a pail.

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But, me, I'd rather kick the bucket
Then half way to the bottom suck it.
I never went too strong on dregs,
Nor omelets made with addled eggs,
Nor hanging hats too long on pegs.
Set habits never cut more ice
With me than mouse-traps do with mice
And custom's quags were no more use
Than duck-ponds to a greylag goose.
My golden rule is, 'Chuck it!
Upsail! The tides cannot delay
That barque who makes them while she may.'

I felt a need of several things, among them human society. However, I failed to establish a *rapport* with any of the students, though I tried my best to make myself companionable. They were not like the students of my days. They were far more sophisticated. I was surprised how much they knew. And their energy was positively appalling. They would work all day and dance all night.

I lost caste every time I mentioned the War. That subject was tabu, *gaga*. Civilization had apparently conspired to ignore the War. It just hadn't happened. Well, I'd have been only too glad to forget it also, but I found almost all my conversation veered back to it before long. In fact, the War was the only thing I *could* remember. In my loneliness and irritation (for I was now coughing a lot at nights) I began to get terrible black fits. When I felt them coming on I knew there was only one thing to do. Unless I had the money to drink myself into a stupor, I must get out and walk and walk and walk. I could not speak coherently at those times. My tongue absolutely refused to complete a sentence. My ears ignored what was said to me. Some people, I could

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see, thought I was a bit mad. Others, the art students, thought I was posing as an eccentric. I could read these opinions in their faces, but I was powerless to explain and even, if I had not been, it would hardly have been worth while. Explain? Where should I begin? With my father's history? I thought much of his ghastly end and what he had gone through, but I was not really afraid of following in his footsteps. I knew my trouble was that I was too damned sane. Too sensitive always to the other fellow's point of view. Had I been present at that execution Thackeray describes somewhere, I should have sympathized not only with Courvoisier but with Jack Ketch. A sensitive man can either build himself a shell, as I had done in my youth, or allow himself to become a sort of psychic sponge. The latter course needs far greater courage than I found at my disposal. I wanted human sympathy, yet my very manner dispelled any predisposition to accord that sympathy. I was in a very bad way indeed, and often contemplated suicide, but got no farther than the contemplation. The wintry waves looked so cold. And, as a matter of fact, I rather enjoyed my misery once it had reached a certain pitch. It helped me to understand Francis Thompson and Henley and Buchanan (*the* Buchanan, not my Buchanan). Further, I linked myself in some obscure way with that Buchanan's *Wandering Jew*, the scapegoat of divine wrath. I felt myself to be a monad in His body, privileged to share His sufferings. Oh no, I wasn't heading the way my mother had gone either. I was just indulging my imagination. I had to get the aftermath of war out of my system somehow. This play-acting was just as effective a safety valve as any other.

Of course, part of my trouble was of sexual origin. Not exactly sexual starvation, for I still picked up women when I could afford to do so, without putting myself in their debt,

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but starvation for something a little less sordid than petty cohabitations. Perhaps among the female art students I hoped to find what I was seeking. At any rate, that hope was never realized. Returning to my digs at night I would voice my sorrows to the Moon. As at school long ago, I found comfort and escape in identifying myself with that lonely wanderer of the night; but for me the Moon was no longer Selene, rather a flourfaced Pierrot, dead long ago of a broken heart, staring wistfully down from his exalted banishment upon the darkened streets and dusky gardens where once he had lived and laughed and loved and later shed bitter tears of jealousy and cruelly disappointed passion, where, too, he had fought valiantly in many a forlorn hope, to survive only as a butt for the scorn of the practical and worldly minded. Apostrophizing this type of all weary love-lorn, heartsick night prowlers, I would ask passionately for guidance in discovering which me was the real me. For at such times I recurred to a fancy I had sometimes entertained when lying in hospital, that I had really been killed by that last bullet, so that, into my empty clay house at its owner's exit might crowd seven and seventy devils, a legion and a Babel, possessed of no fixed beliefs or standards of conduct, no ethics, no hopes, nothing, in fact, but a passionate longing for a charted course and a free hand to follow that course. Then it would suddenly re-occur to me to wonder which of the seven and seventy was this particular gibberer, come to the window of my being to expose his base self-pity to whomsoever it might concern. And therewith I would feel either absolutely suicidal or else would take a hold on myself and immediately feel much better. This was a period when a mendicant or a street singer was sure of 'touching' me if I had the wherewithal, for I could not resist the call of the Fellowship of the Moon.

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About this time, after getting a temporary job in a commercial studio, I began to dream most curious colour dreams. No doubt the extra rum I was now able to afford, and the poster colours I was splashing around all day, had a lot to do with this strange phase; yet at times it seemed to me that a most ingenious imp had somehow wriggled up from my subconscious to spin me fantastic and gorgeous tapestries out of the material which drifted down to him through my senses. My sleeping mind had become a dream factory, or again a colour-film studio staging entire plots in which the characters were pure colour, possessing no other attributes whatever except the capacity to weave themselves into patterns. The colours would materialize out of the blackness of the winter night, swiftly grouping themselves into a sort of aurora of aurae, each shade having a definite but indescribable role, the whole production being a kind of morality play. The aurora would roll aside its curtains, begin to shoot its streamers and to agitate its caste of interblending light values, and the play was on.

Nor must it be imagined I had been steeping my mind in theosophical doctrines, for, at that time, I had hardly heard of theosophy, though I certainly had a vague idea that some sect or other claimed aurae were visible, and that they varied in colour according to the temperament and moods of the emanator. These dreams occurred only during this period and have never returned.

In the studio, where I now earned a few extra shillings, we worked mostly on cinema posters and life-size cardboard cut-outs of Charles Chaplin and other stars. Because of my Western knowledge I was given the cowboys to do. The men working here were more of my age than the art students. In fact, the proprietor was an old friend of my former student days. I began to recover my spirits in this congenial

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company. The War was not tabu here. We talked about it all day. Talking about it dispelled long-bottled miasmas. There were four of us in a small studio. One had to work on the wall. Another on the floor. Paint pots would be upset. Drawings would be sat on, T-squares trodden on and broken. Yet we stayed harmonious. Bawdy tales were exchanged, and bottles of beer and sandwiches were sent out for, when there would be the old familiar searching of pockets to pay the score, and we worked till all hours according to the orders in hand.

Another friend of those days was a photographer who had been in the Air Force and who now had a studio, a real studio, not a paint-splashed attic like ours. He was a member of the R.P.S. and thought nothing of winning £300 prizes in competitions. An American photographic society to which he belonged went so far as to knight him. His letters from U.S.A. bore the superscription, Sir Smith. Through him, I re-met an old schoolmate. This man, once a major, was now a taxi driver, a boss taxi-driver with four taxies of his own; yet he would not buy a new hat. We held a council of war. The first thing to do was to make him dead drunk. That would not be easy. It would be a long-time job — expensive too. However, we accomplished it at last, and the hat was removed, to be placed in cold storage in Smith's dark room.

On the appointed day we met in solemn conclave, arrayed in mourning weeds. Those who had no black suits wore crape sashes. The hat was borne forth on a stretcher and placed upon a waiting car decorated with lilies and with ivy wreaths. We then proceeded sadly through the streets till we reached the filthiest part of the harbour, where the remains were duly committed to the deep to the solemn strains of 'Old Soldiers Never Die'. It remained only to

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invite the chief mourner to purchase drinks, which he did right royally. After that he went about bare headed, for he suffered from the poverty complex in all matters but the provision of beer.

The manager of an advertising company, for whom we did some posters, told me they paid 3s. 6d. for a six-hour day to sandwich men. This he said, was good pay. It used to be as low as 1s. As I sometimes recognized men that I had seen carrying boards earlier in the day, selling papers in the evenings, I assume they invested their princely savings in the hope of making another sixpence or so by way of overtime. Well, of course, it's a life that doesn't ruin the appetite for good plain food, unless the stomach has already grown too weak to digest solids!

I think one of the most macabre effects I have ever witnessed was presented for my especial benefit one morning by a troupe consisting of one solitary sandwichman and a shoal of street urchins. The sandwichman, who was old and rather weak and tottery, was dressed in festive red, as Father Christmas, to advertise somebody's groceries. I came on the company from behind the scenes as it were, for I turned into a side street just in time to sample the full savour of the climax. The urchins had evidently been larking and had finished up by butting Santa Claus just behind his wobbly knees, causing the old man to fall in the gutter. There he was crouched on his hands and knees, weakly cursing, for his hands had got caught under his front board on which he was kneeling, and he was too weak to get them out unaided. Here was a funny animal in a trap, and the urchins were having a glorious time baiting it. But the cream of the horrible jest was not revealed till I came abreast of the old man and got a full-face view of the source from which those filthy but spineless oaths were trickling. By

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way of horrible contrast to the furious face I expected, I beheld under the capote, a jovial, chubby, cotton-bearded canvas mask moulded into a perpetual grin of insipid benevolence.

Besides the posters, our firm also did some scene painting at the local theatres. It is a most thrilling experience to gaze down from the flies upon a performance in train below. We often felt a strong inclination to drop paint-pots.

On my birthday that year I feasted my landlady and her family on lobsters and chianti. We had also an extemporized banquet of music; for on my way back with the lobsters I happened to meet four itinerant musicians — one fiddle, one harp, one 'cello, one vocalist and cap-carrier — so I brought them along. We ushered them into the back-yard, tuned them up with beer, and there was our private orchestra.

My landlady was in some trepidation as to the respectability of this proceeding. She was always experiencing these misgivings, good soul, but she put up with everything I sprang on her and would strap up the board for weeks at a time, months in fact. Her house was a most respectable one. She always made a point of that. Yet I was allowed (and I only of all the roomers) to have young ladies to tea occasionally in my room. The only time Mrs. Parsons betrayed serious qualms was the one occasion when my sister visited me. Even then she gave way, but gave me to understand it must not occur frequently. After I had seen my sister back to her digs and had returned, Mrs. Parsons took me aside in great agitation.

'I know you take me for a mug, mister,' she said. 'But I'm not such a mug as you take me for. You and your sister! I don't believe you ever 'ad a sister. If you think I'm going to run a brothel just for your benefit, you're mistaken, that's

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all. This 'ouse 'as always been respectable. Everyone 'oo knows me 'll tell you that.'

And all this because my sister, who is an actress, was playing in the town under an assumed name and I had been unwise enough to show Mrs. Parsons a paragraph about her in the paper. But my landlady was quite human. The good soul liked her drop of rum almost as much as I did. But she never took more than a fair drop, whereas I took a good many. We used to exorcise the demon rum by burning him on a plate. This is a great drink for winter nights, but undoubtedly hard on the liver.

Yet even good-hearted Mrs. Parsons had to tighten up sometimes, or she would inevitably have found herself headed for the workhouse. She had told me of many queer fish, of some of which she had had a devil of a job in ridding herself. One now came under my notice. This was a new lodger, a frail little woman with silvery hair and a bloodless face. One could not decide which was the weaker, her husky ghost of a voice or her flimsy, ivory-hued, parchment-and-bone frame in its very old, very worn, nurse's uniform. She crept about like some broken insect. But she paid her first week in advance and was installed in the very top room, the attic above mine, very cold, from which I could hear her hollow cough echoing my own. That first week's rent was all that Nurse Harris ever paid, and she lasted at least three months. Morning after morning, unless too sick to go out, the frail bird-like creature, after locking her door, would sally forth with her cheap suit-case to look for work. But never with success. Then back she would creep, often half frozen, so that for very shame good Mrs. Parsons could not refuse her a seat at the kitchen fire nor a cup of tea and a round of toast or a bowl of soup.

'I do believe that's all the poor soul lives on,' she told me.

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Then one day, sitting writing in my room, wearing my overcoat and hat, for it was perishing cold, I heard a heavier step in the room above. It sounded like my landlady's. It was. A few minutes later there was a knock on my door.

'Come down to the kitchen, mister,' Mrs. P. invited. 'You look 'alf starved. I'll make you a cup of tea, for I want to 'ave a talk with you.'

Then she divulged how, noticing the nurse's door had been left open for once, she made bold to step inside, 'just to see 'ow she'd been treating my property'. The first thing she noticed was a strong smell of alcohol, and then she saw a fifteen shilling money order lying on the floor near the chest of drawers. Her fortune-hunting instincts aroused, Mrs. Parsons opened a drawer, to find there a pile of correspondence which she permitted herself to glance at.

'I wouldn't 'ave done a thing like that, Mister,' she excused herself, 'only you know 'ow things are. I 'ad my suspicions the old bitch 'ad been fooling me. And I wasn't far wrong either. What d'you think them letters are?'

She paused to enjoy my awakened curiosity.

'She's a begging letter writer, that's what she is, Mister. You read about people being 'ad up for that sort of thing in the papers.'

'But surely she can't do very well at it?' I objected. 'You can see she hasn't had a square meal for months.'

'Ah, that's just it,' burst out Mrs. Parsons. 'The old bitch! What d'you think I found in them other drawers? 'Alf a dozen empty brandy bottles and another two-thirds full. She don't live on food, Mister. She lives on booze.'

'Well, I've struck some cautions in my time,' she went on, 'but she's the limit. I won't 'alf trim 'er up, believe me! when she comes back 'ere cadging 'er usual cup of tea.'

Now Nurse Harris, whatever her faults, was a very sick

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woman, as I who lay and listened to her coughing at night was perfectly well aware. It was obvious she had reached a stage when alcohol, varied by an occasional slice of toast, had become her natural diet. I pointed this out to Mrs. Parsons.

‘No doubt you’re right, Mister,’ that good lady admitted. ‘But she’s either going to pay up or get out. I’ve been made a fool of once too often.’

Next morning there was a ‘Room to Let’ notice in Mrs. Parson’s front window. That night there was a fall of snow. The morning after, on going to the door for the milk, she found her evicted lodger lying on the doorstep, soaked with half-melted snow and stupified with cold. No other places would take Nurse Harris. They all knew her little games.

We got her to bed with a hot water bottle at her feet and a couple of hot toddies inside her, I happening to have a bottle at the time; but her night out had proved too much for an exhausted constitution. She died a few days later.

‘Here’s me, playing the mug again,’ Mrs. Parsons sighed ruefully as she sent her diminutive, out-of-work husband down to notify the authorities. ‘All this fuss and bother and not a penny to show for it.’ But I could see a self-gratulatory gleam in her eye all the same, for not only the elect are rewarded with finer coin than money. Though Mrs. Parsons knew nothing about the tenets of the Buddhists, something deep down in her knew it had been ‘permitted to acquire merit’.

Mrs. Parsons could never remember my name. With her I was always ‘Mister’ to my face and ‘Mister wiv the corf’ to her cronies. In the winter of 1923 ‘the corf’ got me down properly, for I had been foolish enough to take off my coat to a half day’s gardening job and to keep it off during a slight snow storm. My mother had already invited me to

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spend Christmas week with her. I arrived and collapsed. She became alarmed and suggested a warmer climate, a charitable notion which met with no opposition from me. I thought of the South of France, but my mother concluded I would stand more chance of earning my living in Australia. As soon as I was well enough to travel, she presented me with a second-class berth in S.S. *Orsova*.

CHAPTER XIII

AN OCEAN INTERLUDE

Just before leaving England I saw a film, called 'Australia's Wild West'. It was mostly concerned with the Broome pearling grounds and was romantic enough to revive my spirits considerably. Australia could not be too bad after all! Coming out of the Philharmonic Hall into the chill February twilight, I promised myself, if the forthcoming voyage to Perth restored my ability to breathe, I would lose no time in getting up into that remote corner of Australia where such things were to be seen and done . . . *if I found I could breathe again*. That was the condition: otherwise I didn't care what might become of me. I was sick to death of the life asthmatic.

My first two days on board the R.M.S. *Orsova* were dismal enough. I walked the deck as much as possible, getting a large medicinal draught of the most uncomfortably fresh Atlantic air, and scowling at anyone who looked at all like accosting me, for I dreaded the inevitable dreary explanations . . . 'No, I don't smoke, thanks . . . makes me cough . . . been gassed.' For nowadays, it seemed, everyone, male or female, produced cigarettes sooner or later. One youthful parson of the pathetically would-be-sporting variety all flabby muscles and manly jollity, even went so far as to recommend a pipe, when flung (violently) into my company in the Bay of Biscay. 'It looks so nautical, don't you think?' he roared down wind at me. The ass thought I was seasick, and no wonder, for I kept staggering to the rail to spit.

However, on the third morning, I woke to the pleasing

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realization that I had not coughed even once during the night. All that day I remained immune *and* the next night. My hopes revived with a bound, and not in vain. It seemed like a miracle. Not till the night after I landed in Fremantle did the cough trouble me again. From now on I regained, daily, strength and interest in life, and I soon went around the deck beaming on everyone, even willing to swop cigarettes and yarns with that podgy young parson.

The voyage was indeed an interlude for me, and one which I enjoyed so much that I am tempted to enlarge on one or two episodes.

In the delightful book, *A Tramp's Sketches*, Mr. Stephen Graham says: 'It sometimes happens that, entering a house, one enters not simply into the presence of a family but into that of a nation . . . It sometimes happens that, looking at a picture, one sees not only its local beauty, but its eternal significance and meaning . . . that is a similar experience.'

These remarks apply most aptly to the impressions one gathers when touching at seaports just long enough to savour the local tang. For, though all seaports are alike, in the manner in which all sailors bear the stamp of their calling, each port does most remarkably suggest the flavour of its hinterland. Yet, of course, the nature of one's impressions is liable to be considerably modified by the companions with whom one goes ashore. Had I spent those few hours in Gibraltar by myself, for instance, my impressions of the general raree show would no doubt have been far more vivid. When we steamed on, I should have borne away a mental panorama stretching from the mysterious, darkly frowning mountains of Africa, past those ancient Pillars where the hero's mighty club crashed down, to the harbour kennelling its lean, swift ocean grey-hounds, and so to the Rock with its beautiful hanging gardens, its Barbary apes

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among the bougainvilleas, its bazaar-like main street, its British Tommies, Levantine merchants, Spanish herdsmen and bernouse-clad Moors: these stereotyped memories borne away like a packet of picture post-cards might have been mine and nothing more.

However, I was not fated to go ashore alone, but as one of a ribald party under the leadership of just such another one-man-vaudeville-show as that swift current Green of my maiden voyage, a decade and a half ago. This was an Australian named 'Snowey' Dwyer: and, in the habits of the *Rock Scorpions* (touts, guides, pimps and lottery ticket pedlars), and particularly in that variety which perches on the box of its fiacre and pursues the tourist, persistently importuning him to get in and be driven round the sights, Snowey's artist eye at once recognized rich material by means of which he proceeded to transform our four-hour visit into a farce, a farce which quite naturally relegated the local atmosphere to a subordinate position as mere stage and background.

Dwyer was an Aussie of the salted brand, a long, shrivelled strip of stringy-bark, ending in a red bullet head adorned with a long straight wedge of a nose between eyes so close-set, jet-black, and mischievous, that his aspect was just that of a very intelligent baboon. His sharp, dry bark of a laugh added to this cynocephalic impression.

We started off on foot with an escort of at least six vehicles trailing behind. Relying on the precipitous nature of their stronghold to tire us out, the drivers tailed us patiently, taking advantage of every halt we made to urge us to see the sights like gentlemen. But their blandishments fell flat. Emerging from each bar we called at, with a swarm of lottery touts at our heels, we would find our hopeful escort waiting for us and only too happy to battle ferociously on our behalf with the other 'scorpions'. Having dispersed the touts,

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they would whip up their shambling skates and jog after us, usually catching up just in time to watch us disappear into another bar. This went on for quite an hour. Then, we noticed, they were dropping off one by one. Possibly the lottery crowd had knifed the stragglers or some of the horses may have fallen dead under the protracted strain. At any rate, eventually only one die-hard remained with us. This was an ancient jehu in a black frock coat, straw hat with gaudy ribbon, and cream, striped trousers almost as sun-burnt and wrinkled as his Chinese ham of a face. Politeness itself, he conceived the pretty idea of driving a little ahead, hopping off the box, opening the door and bowing invitingly as we passed. Three times he did this and each time Snowey raised his hat and bowed ceremoniously in return. On the fourth occasion our leader's heart seemed touched.

'Pretty warm walking, after all,' he reminded us. 'What about patronizing this bloke? He's got a nice kind face. Maybe he'd take out the horse and pull the sulky himself if we asked him nicely.'

'What about another pot first?' said someone.

'Not on your life. We might lose him.'

We gaped.

'Haven't we been trying to lose him?'

From the depths of his guile, Snowey ignored this foolish question. 'Well, I'm getting in, for one,' he said, with just the suspicion of a wink.

So in we all piled. The beaming cabby shut the door, not without some difficulty, raised his hat again and climbed on to the box. Now we were all set for a nice ride, trapped and apparently tamed by the topography.

'Hold on a minute!' Snowey commanded.

The driver checked his pathetic efforts to start his animal and turned ingratiatingly just in time to see Dwyer open the

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further door, hop out, motion us to follow, and then gravely raise his hat once again. Tumbling to the idea, we all descended, nor did we neglect to raise our hats in like manner as we trailed across the road to a handy restaurant where Snowey ordered lunch.

Have you noticed the expression on the face of a hungry cat when it has pounced and missed its bird? Even such was the baffled and speechless wrath, mingled with not a little bewilderment, on that 'scorpion's' countenance. Then he left his perambulating lair and followed us. The restaurant proprietor should bear witness; we had legally hired his cab. But that huge, perspiring Greek, fearing these strange creatures might play himself a similar trick, flung his arms about so threateningly that his rival 'scorpion' wilted before this superior force and, for all the world like a storm-battered blowfly, crawled, buzzing in testy impotence, back to his box and so away down the Rock.

'That's bloke's not quite so toney as I thought,' Snowey commented as we tackled our oysters. 'Did you notice he actually went off without raising his hat?'

In our next port of call, however, I gave Snowey the slip. Somehow his breezy, far-from-innocent-abroad temperament jarred quite perceptibly in the milleniums-old thoroughfares of Toulon. No doubt, cheery, sufficient-unto-the-hour Snoweys aplenty had stepped ashore here in the days of the Caesars, or in those of Solomon for that matter; but to have Snowey along in the flesh did not help one to reconstruct those Snoweys of the past. And that was just what Toulon instantly invited me to do. So I steered him into the Apollo dancehall, where certain handmaidens of the Fertility goddess, well-skilled to entertain the pilgrim to-day as of old, at once took charge of his immediate future, leaving me free to regain those fascinating streets. Here statues, fountains,

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cobble-stones, the very trees, hinted at the Roman occupation and may even, it seemed, have dated back to the vanished Empire. I noticed, for instance, one stone hitching-post in the shape of a thyrsus, to which the governor's litter mules may well have been anchored beside the shaggy ponies of the Gauls. And in a gaudy shrine with its pink- and blue-robed wax figures I could detect nothing incompatible with that thyrsus. The Earth Mother often materializes in wax and tinsel as well as in stolid stone, for, after all, the fragility of wax is nearer to the warm evanescence of the flesh.

Now we pass into stormy weather and so to Naples, serenely filthy, colourful even beneath grey skies, light-hearted, magnificently lazy. The decks are invaded by hosts of uniforms containing men, customs and harbour officials, soldiers, sailors, policemen, Salvation Army representatives, porters, guides, and everywhere the Fascisti, fine fellows in fine plumage, dashing Americano hats and opera-villain capuches. They are on the look-out for suspicious characters — especially those with pretty faces and neat ankles.

On account of the rain, I contemplate shelter and mild refreshment of mind and body, not in the Arcades among those charlatan caterers who make all cities disgustingly alike, but in some genuine native haunt where I can peer into the kitchen and watch the dirt going comfortably into the food.

This night I am lucky. Providence sends a guide to intercept me on the grimy, rain-sodden quay — no official guide, as he, himself, declares in near-enough English picked up when sailing, but a butcher working in an *abattoir*. His work is rationed to three days a week, so he is free to offer his services to-night, but I must not let the regular guides suspect because their union is so fussy.

Capisto! I wish to spend this evening in a dry place, but

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not too dry . . . just as he, himself, might. I would sample wine such as the workmen drink.

Righto! He will treat me as if I were his own brother up from his farm in the country.

Capital!

Would I like to see woman making love to women in twenty (or was it fifty) different attitudes, very amusing?

Quite patiently I explain my wishes again. I will make good any commissions he may lose through my eccentric lack of curiosity.

He begs my pardon profusely. How could he have been so stupid? How about a picture show and supper at a wine shop to follow?

The very thing. But first, wine such as the workmen drink. Accordingly we make for a long, dim, subterranean cavern where a lass with an eye, that was dark and roaring if ever an eye roared and was dark, leaves an aged crone, with whom she is crouched over a brazier, to fill and refill our glasses. Once more into the rain, threading dismal, narrow, miry streets, till we enter a cheap cinema where my guide insists on doing the honours . . . twopenny seats, six rows from the screen, and, all about us, wet youths smoking rank cigarettes. I fear for my cough, but sit half an hour out of politeness. The picture has been shot by someone with a good sense of composition and written by someone with a fine, fiery sense of honour. My throat rebels at last.

More threadings of ill-lit mazes, using the cobbles as stepping stones between puddles. Here are iron-balconied canyons where Juliets may have entertained Romeos in the dead past, for most of the buildings bear intricate ornaments, and some, coats-of-arms. So we reach a bleary-windowed eating-house on the ground floor of what seems like an ancient palace. The windows exhibit indifferently cleaned

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octopi, a cracked plate of tomatoes, a thick, blue-raw, fly-haunted steak, a couple of yellowish cucumbers, a red chilli or two, and a dish of most revoltingly forced meat. It is a typical sea-port eatinghouse, except that this is probably the king-stye of the bunch.

My guide looks at me apologetically. '*You* asked for this sort of thing. *Me*, I always do my best to satisfy my clients,' his glance plainly says.

Inside are casks of wine. Ranged along one wall are dust-coated bottles of all shapes — fantastically pulled out or pushed in, some three-sided and indented as if squeezed by some powerful, spade-fingered fist, others rotund as cellarer-monks and reinforced against further expansion with wicker-work swathings.

At one wine-puddled marble-top sits a lively group of the local proletariat — two black-satin-shirted, black-hatted workmen, a blue-cloaked policeman and a black-shawled, raven-haired young woman. We occupy the only other table and order spaghetti, stewed octopus, and red wine. My guide knows all about wine from the poor man's point of view. I know nothing from any point of view except that this brand tastes better than the vinegars, peppers, and syrups I sampled during the war.

A bent crone trails a foul dish-clout over the greasy slough on our table and, with many friendly nods, begs us to be patient while she hobbles to the door, for a basket fastened to a rope has just jerked itself down from the upper regions of the tenement to settle on the pavement before the entrance. Into this she puts a bottle, some vegetables and a long loaf. Whereon it re-ascends. Now arrives the proprietor, a little apple-cheeked man whose cape and gaiters are sodden, for he has just returned from a wine-buying expedition out beyond Vesuvius.

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He drinks with us, calling attention with hearty pride to the decorations on the low-pitched ceiling — blue-robed goddesses, pale pink flowers, golden ribbons, love-birds and cardboard clouds, his very own work, a Neapolitan ice in paint. No Michel Angelo, our host, not even a passable sign-writer, yet a gay soul who had succeeded in transmitting a syrup and water gaiety to his establishment — syrup and water in a filthy glass.

Now come our spaghetti and our pink india-rubbery cubes of devil-fish. I make a rather heavy passage through this uncharted mess, when, to my aid, comes a drunken young fisherman, bare-headed, wine-flushed, wine-plumped. He takes my plate and shows me how to eat spaghetti. He would take my glass and show me how to drink wine also, but I forestall that move. His facial gymnastics over the spaghetti sadden me considerably. I have had just about enough of the Naples of the workman.

The young fisherman now lies under a cask and lets the wine run into his mouth and out of the corners, till his long black hair is clotted with wine-sodden sawdust. Our host, coming in from the kitchen, brusquely turns off the tap and, going to the door, bawls a complaint to someone across the street. A fat, frowsy, and nearly naked young woman enters a few minutes later, to seize the young fisherman in two arms like hams and drag him off home.

Sticky coffee, stickier liqueur, and a sticky trudge back to the coal-grimed wharf. I tip my guide, and am ferried in a pitching dinghy back to a bath and the warmth and dryness of my bunk, which *by contrast* has become irrefutably the best spot in Naples. George Locke's theory again. Heaven in a dry pair of socks! Naples from the inside in five hours on a stormy night — could any American tourist compass as much, and end the night in such unruffled contentment?

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Next morning I came on deck after breakfast just in time to see a fat custom's official fall from the slippery gangway into the refuse-fouled turmoil of the harbour. He was rescued by a fruit vendor who managed to spill half his stock into the water in performing this charitable act. The poor man was evidently half minded to let go of the fat official's shoulders and retrieve his bobbing oranges.

The storm had not much abated when we pulled out. Vesuvius was at no time clearly to be seen, but loomed, cloud on brow, like a sulky giant in the thick and uncertain offing. A tug rode easily past us, dipping and rising in the tumult, a large black duck joyously at home in her element.

Suddenly there came a break in the heavens; the lances of the sun darted through, rending the grey veil with shafts of greenish gold, like flame seen through an emerald. Way up on the topmost crag of Capri, serene above all secular discords, a solitary crucifix gleamed for an instant like a cross of fire. Then the sad, grey mist reclaimed it.

At that moment I heard sobs, deep strangled sounds. Surely, it was that most distressing phenomenon, a strong man weeping! Turning, I saw a portly figure in sumptuous plus fours, brogues, and tweed cap. Tears were streaming down his chubby, beery cheeks. I had already noted this man and had set him down as a *nouveau riche*, a war profiteer if ever there were one. Nothing could be more grotesque. Whatever could this bleated caricature of a human being possibly find to snivel over? I was about to walk away, when he blew his nose and apologized in so shamefaced a fashion that I had to stay and listen. He had just received a radiogram saying his son was dead. That fiery cross had been the last straw.

But why had he troubled to apologize? Obviously for the same reason that he garbed himself so funnily in unsuitable

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clothes — exhibitionism. He felt important in his grief. How could I feel really sorry for this man? Later observations confirmed my harsh judgment. Lonely, pathetic, yet an ill-bred, ill-mannered, narrow-minded, overfed ass, his only solace was from his plate and his glass.

Port Said . . . glaring flatness, seashore with nothing behind it but more seashore. Here, of course, and at Colombo, I could not repeat my Naples tactics, the gulf between myself and the natives being insuperable. So I had to content myself with the usual tourist pursuits with which I need not burden this narrative.

I may, however, record the fact that soon after leaving Suez, I saw a hoopoe, for a specimen of that rare and beautiful visitor to the British Isles flew aboard, apparently out of the heart of a continent of baking sand, to steal a ride down the length of the Red Sea, leaving us only just as we sighted the Twelve Apostles.

Let me end with a recipe for anyone wishing to recapture the thrill of sail, even though ramping along under steam. Get right up into the bows and lean out over the rail to bathe your machine-weary glance in the dazzling embroidery of foam that fans away and aside from the ship's plunging strides like a milk-white fetlock flowing back from the fore-foot of some ocean stallion! Here, in this curdling, slithering, foam-drowning, foam-drowned pattern about which the bottle-blue dolphins play, one may lose the present completely, for this gleaming froth is none other than the creamy limbs of Aphrodite about which the Nereids still lace themselves in ever dissolving trceries as enchanting to modern eyes as to those of the first mariner.

CHAPTER XIV

BROOME STAGES

WHEN *Orsova* hooted hideously like some escaped sea monster rapidly regaining the ocean with exultant flukes, while the snapped streamers, gay no longer, trailed dejectedly from her rail, I turned with a most decidedly empty feeling to face a new chapter and, as usual, to face it alone.

Nevertheless my spirits began to revive during the short train ride between the port and Perth, for there was, about the coaches, and again about the wayside stations with their homely advertisement hoardings, something very familiar and comforting. And by 'familiar' I don't mean an exact replica of the England I had just left (that was the exciting part about it!), but rather of the vanished England of my boyhood, three decades ago. It was exactly like jogging in a delightful dream back to some English county town of the 'nineties.

Then I arrived in Perth, walked straight down Barrack Street to the Swan River and lost my heart once and for all to that lovely vista. Expecting a repetition of the grime and dreariness of Fremantle, I had come on a garden city planted in an Eden which was the result of a century's co-operation between man and nature. Moreover, I was not slow to remark the equally glorious fact that Fortune had dumped me in a city where the percentage of girls who were not merely pretty but actually beautiful seemed undoubtedly higher than I had ever noticed elsewhere.

I took a room overlooking a spot where I had seen a pelican paddling beyond the bamboo-fringed marge of the

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bluest stretch of river I had yet encountered. Then, having just eight shillings left, I set about getting work. Nor did Fortune abandon me here.

That very first day I made a friend who was to figure largely in my subsequent development and who kicked off, not merely by showing how I could earn money, but by dipping into his pocket and forcing on me an entirely unsolicited loan.

'Look, brother,' said Garland, peering at me over his gold-rimmed spectacles, as I exhibited specimen drawings to him in his capacity as manager of the Codrington Commercial Studios, 'I can't give you any work, but I *can* give you a good tip. Why not write your first impressions of Perth and take them round to the *Sunday Times*? They like that sort of thing. If they don't use it, come back to me and I'll think up something else.'

I found his advice excellent. The paper took a column and a half without turning a hair. So I cast about for fresh subjects, hitting on a lumpers' picnic being held that very day at the Zoo as not unlikely material. This article also I had no difficulty in placing, and was even able to sell to an illustrated weekly a series of drawings I had made of some of the zoo animals. Thus, at the very start of my Westralian venture, I was led to form connections which were to add considerably to my income. My lines had indeed fallen in pleasant places. In England, a man would have had to have lived and died for a generation or so before he could possibly have effected so much on so short a notice.

But there was another side to the picture. My 'corf' had returned that first night and was now growing rapidly worse. Indeed, it soon became so bad that it left me little energy for writing. When not coughing, I slept to gain fresh strength to cough again. In this extremity, Garland again came to

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my rescue by lending me his cottage in the Darling Hills, twenty odd miles from Perth. There I rapidly recovered and, by reason of those already formed newspaper connections, was able to contribute by mail.

I must now mention a most curious phenomenon, one which either directly or by subsequent suggestion, I am still never quite sure which, was hereafter to affect the course of my life more than a little. I have referred at intervals to a capacity for escaping immediate irritations by merging myself in imagination with some natural object for which I have conceived an affection. Thus, at school, I imagined myself at times into a seeming identity with the ash coppices hanging on the downs, and later, when in great mental stress after the war, again succeeded in losing myself in contemplation of that lonely mirror of all lonely wanderers, the moon. Now, once more, that strange capacity was to provide me with both welcome and disturbing 'escape'; escape, moreover, that was to be attended with far-reaching results, recurrent over long intervals and culminating in a climax almost unbelievable in this modern world. But perhaps Australia is not quite so modern as its more progressive inhabitants prefer to assume.

The manner of the incipience of this phenomenon was gentle but distinctly unsettling.

On my first evening at Garland's bungalow, I felt pretty weak, for the exertion of walking up the steep rise from the station had brought on a bad attack of breathlessness. However, after moonrise, I felt better, and so went out on to the balcony to enjoy the beauty of the valley which flowed away beneath me, between its shouldering primeval hills, like some silver-point Eden, for Garland had built in the loneliest and most romantic scenery he could find within reasonable access of the little town of Darlington.

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Thus, there was no sound but the reeding of thousands of frogs in the creek below, the steady cropping of herbage by some cattle near at hand, and the occasional and very weird call of a mopoke. Overcome with the beauty of the scene, in my weak state, I felt like bursting into tears. Then it came to me how I had previously won to 'escape' by mergence. Why not again here and now? Could I not pass out into and become one with that moonlit valley and so win to oblivion of my asthma-wracked existence for a grateful spell?

No sooner had this idea taken possession of my mind than I began to experience a curious feeling of comfort, almost as if I were being caressed physically, as if I were a cat that some invisible well-wisher had stooped to stroke. My whole body purred with pleasure, a pleasure in which my mind, beyond an intense inquisitiveness, held no share, holding itself aloof in considerable alarm, for I had not expected such immediate and 'unnaturally' easy success in my projected experiment: besides, the result had been far different from anything I had ever managed to evoke before. This was something much more definite and personal, not so much an escape out of myself as a mergence achieved without any effort; in a word, an experience quite convincingly actual, so that for the first time I was perfectly sure my imagination was not entirely responsible. There had been a mutual approach. Something outside myself had responded, and the response was no subjective hallucination. I had actually performed a successful invocation.

As soon as I had realized this, I felt frightened and immediately willed myself to repel whatever had undertaken this solicited invasion. Instantly that strange feeling vanished — 'withdrew' is perhaps more accurate, for there was a momentary but distinct sensation of out-seeping — and I found myself a normal person once more, neither more nor

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less than myself, gazing in a rather scared and shaken mood at a lonely and lovely world. Whatever it was, it had accepted its dismissal as readily as the previous invitation, but, in going, had left me with a queer assurance that, though sensitive to rebuff, it would return. My play-acting was gone for ever. Some indescribable connection had been established. Hereafter I must weigh the consequences before proceeding.

Feeling thoroughly frightened, I went inside and made up the fire. Nor did I at that time make any further efforts at communion with that unknown force. I wanted time to think. When, at length, with returning health (and my health returned with surprising swiftness after this experience) I regained courage and set myself to invoke a repetition of the phenomenon, nothing happened. I was normal again; I won't say sane, for I was convinced I had been sane all along, though naturally the knowledge of my unsound family history supplied the substance of many a mental argument. What if my father had experienced something of the sort during the period before he became too incoherent to report it! What more likely? And what more likely than that he should have felt no wish to report it? Everyone does not suffer from that form of exhibitionism which impels the writer to set down his experiences either autobiographically or through the mummery of romance, that urge which impelled St. Catherine, for instance, to record her ecstasies, or, to take a modern instance, which drove Oliver Onions to write his *Beckoning Fair One*, or again, D. H. Lawrence to record in *Kangaroo* his reaction to some palpable presence which his sensitive personality had detected in this very valley in which I was now lodged. Not that I had read any of these writers at the time. Though naturally, with my interest aroused by this personal clue, I have since suspected

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many veiled, and credited all direct, allusions to similar experiences. And just as naturally my reading has from that time systematically followed this line of interest; I won't say, of research, for that smacks of a devoted absorption of which I am not capable and of a scientific exactitude of observation which is foreign to my nature, and which seems to me inimical to intimate and unvicarious emotional experience.

More of this later as the story of my further development demands. At the moment I could obtain no more results, yet not for a moment did this lack of success convince me I had been suffering from a delusion. Nor did this failure dishearten me. On the contrary, now that the cough was gone again, I enjoyed life to the hilt and I employed this fresh lease of energy in writing verse, which for once came easily and naturally, just as if I had actually known inspiration; or was it that all the conditions now conspired to help? For contentment and health among beautiful surroundings were now mine, after years of dingy disappointment, accompanied and alleviated by considerable reading of the poets it is true, but relentlessly overshadowed by the tragedy and the aftermath of the War. Now it seemed I had left all that behind.

In fact, I experienced such a resurgence of health and will to adventure, that when I received three months' pension cheques all together as the result of a delay in the transference of my papers from England, I saw no reason why I should not start travelling again. Though I longed to write, I also longed for action and, as in that period before the War of which this now seemed a marvellous resurgence, my restlessness won hands down.

Thus I bought myself a ticket to Derby, in the Kimberley country, which is Australia's extreme north-western corner,

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and so proceeded aboard S.S. *Bambra*, the state-owned coasting vessel in the nor'-west and Singapore trades. My object was to take a look at the hotter areas and, if possible, to see for myself if De Rougemont was right about those rideable turtles.

If the Soviet States had ever felt the need of a real floating model for an ideal communistic community they could not have done better than to dispatch an emissary to study the curriculum of the *Bambra*. Officers and crew were seen to be just like one happy family, each individual performing his duties efficiently and, if not with quite that exaggerated dispatch which his fellow communists with wavy gold armlets would welcome, at least fast enough to avoid any serious disagreement. Stewards, of course, would not be found quite so approachable as the skipper, or even the boatswain, but then stewards are a class apart the seven seas over.

The *Bambra's* first class dining saloon was decorated with painted panels of chubby naked boys embracing geese and strings of sausages. Now there is only one country where they do that sort of thing complete with sausages, so I was not surprised to find the vessel was indeed a German ship, formerly in the Island trade, which had been captured and interned and later acquired for the W.A. coastal trade. And the food in the first saloon was in keeping with the excellent Jugend-like decorations.

In three days we were round nor'-west Cape and approaching tropic waters with satisfying dispatch. Moreover, those disturbing mystic cogitations of mine were completely shelved for the time being in the joyful anticipation of normal adventure.

The principal occupations of the nor'-west group themselves under three heads, sheep, cattle, and pearls. In the past, gold was also prominent. Among my fellow passengers

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were several representatives of each of these activities, the pearlers being most in evidence as recounters of romantic yarns. So to the pearlers I gravitated and especially to one, Bert Laramie, a one-eyed veteran of the Boer War, now a Broome master pearler. He told me of many hair-raising episodes, chief among which, perhaps for interest, were his two encounters with Sampson, a black fellow bad man, who is still at large to date, I believe. As these illustrate black fellow ethics, and those of the fairer-minded type of whites when dealing with the blacks, I give them here.

Laramie had at one time among his crew three Montgomery Island boys, one of whom, while Laramie was camped ashore for some reason, took a fancy to Sampson's most lately acquired wife, and was eventually ill-advised enough to induce the lady to go bush with him. The incensed spouse immediately went down to the pearlers' camp during Laramie's absence and forthwith maimed the other two Montgomery boys, slashing them across the thighs with a spear. He then hit after the fugitives. Within twelve hours of his departure, the maimed boys, sitting fearfully by their fire, were startled by two sullen plops in the ashes at their feet, these being made by two bloodstained objects which had been flung into the camp from the dense surrounding bush. They were a man's arm and a woman's breast.

It is for little escapades of this sort that Sampson has been outlawed, but he is cunning enough never to touch a white man nor to show himself to any white whose boys he may have injured. And he was completely within his rights in this instance, according to tribal law, for the Australian black fellow in his unspoiled and wild state strongly resents any interference with his seraglio. However, the white man's prestige has to be maintained so, wherever he goes, he sees to it that his law is substituted for the local procedure. For

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this reason solely, and not from any personal animosity, Laramie determined to get even with the outlaw if ever an opportunity offered. And sure enough, some years later, Sampson, who had never seen Laramie at close quarters, walked into a camp occupied by the pearler, who, for his part, had never seen Sampson at all.

Apprized of the identity of his visitor by a decidedly nervous member of his crew, Laramie had availed himself of this long-awaited chance to lure the bad man into the cabin of his lugger, the bait used being a gramophone, which was 'a new one' on Sampson at that time. When he had his quarry inside, Laramie shut down the hatch on him and thereafter set sail for Wyndham and the nearest police station, where he delivered his prisoner without further incident. The fact that Sampson escaped almost immediately after being handed over did not appear to worry the pearler one bit. The important thing was that he, personally, had taught the outlaw that meddling with his camp-boys and crews was not a matter that would be overlooked. The game now stood at quits.

There is a curious similarity about tall yarns. They are all variants, masquerading under local idioms, of the seven original short story plots, the secret of exploiting which commercially can be procured for a trifling sum down and a few monthly instalments from any reputable correspondence school. I had great pleasure in recognizing many an old favourite in new guise as they popped up during the smoke-room talk. But I also heard enough seemingly quite genuine histories to feel sure there must be considerable fire behind so much smoke.

My imagination afire with yarns of black fellow warfare, kidney-fat cannibalism, burst-pipes, divers' paralysis, leprosy, beri-beri, sharks, devil fish, whales, sting rays, lucky finds,

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sudden deaths, and queer out-back personalities who had looked more than once on the last mentioned phenomena, it was only natural I should ask Laramie if there was any chance of my finding employment in the pearling game. Laramie said, certainly, every chance. He couldn't give me a job himself, because he was quite satisfied with the shell-openers he already had, but he would see what he could fix up for me elsewhere. He was as good as his word.

On our arrival in Broome, he went immediately to the telephone at the head of the lengthy pier and rang up a friend, returning in five minutes to tell me he had already succeeded in placing me with Brand, the local baker, a one-lugger man, with whom pearling was a sideline.

When I asked Laramie how he knew Brand needed an opener, he said: 'You remember that tall, bearded scarecrow in the greasy moleskins who came aboard at Hedland with a pearl box under his arm? I pointed out the pearl-box to you and told you what it was. Well, I heard that fellow telling the chief steward to book his passage to Brand. So I guessed something was wrong, for he'd evidently quit his job in the middle of the 'tucker' (three-months' period at sea for which a lugger is provisioned). That gave me the idea of asking Brand if he needed another opener. You're on a good thing. That fellow must have had his own reasons for quitting. Brand's all right. I've always found him a white man.'

So here was I, landed with the very job I had hankered after, and without raising a finger to get it. Australia had treated me handsomely right from the start. Friends, health, a most extraordinary experience, almost a personal benediction as I was tempted to believe, and now this romantic job.

Laramie's conjecture was correct. Fred Mason, the bearded opener had quit for reasons of his own. He had wired Brand from Hedland that he couldn't work any more

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with his diver . . . 'too cheeky'. Igashi, the diver, had simultaneously wired his owner that he couldn't work any longer with Fred . . . 'altogether too dirty'. Whether Fred's allegation was correct remained to be proved. That Igashi's accusation was founded on something more than the average Jap's exaggerated sense of cleanliness was patent both to the eye and the nose when confronted with Fred's unsavoury person. He would have been refused work on a sanitary dump.

So Brand offered me the billet at the usual wage of eight pounds a month, tucker, and fifteen per cent on pearls. He explained that the lugger was not out for pearls especially, but for 'shell' (mother-of-pearl). There was a difference between the two sorts of 'fishing'. Pearls were usually found in deeper water than shell, and where there were pearls the shell was less abundant. All the same, 'stones' were of frequent enough occurrence in any fishing ground to warrant the employment of an opener even on a 'shell' boat. And, of course, there was always the chance of a valuable pearl turning up between the valves of any oyster from any ground. In the case of such a fortunate find it would be my duty to proceed back to port right away. Only then would I be expected to exert my authority over the diver to order a return to port. All other details were left to his sagacity and local knowledge. The Japs resented any interference from anyone but their owner. The opener, though provided with a temporary and entirely honorary mate's certificate, is actually nothing but a supercargo, and indeed is addressed by the diver and crew as 'Mr. Clerk', a title into which a whole heap of respectful disrespect can be packed as in the slightly similar relationship between old N.C.O.s and a green subaltern.

I was to find this comparison hardly strong enough. For

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the subaltern does not live with his N.C.O.s when off parade. Whereas the unfortunate shell-opener shares his two-bunk cabin with the diver. He is regarded by the crew as the owner's spy. He is alone with his coloured men for weeks, sometimes for months together, when working away from other luggers carrying white men. All the time he has to rely on his conscious racial superiority and his fund of tact. Luckily for the Australian, he has usually a large fund of conscious racial superiority. My own conscious superiority was not racial. It was just that, with the Pharisee, I feel impelled to say, 'Lord, I thank thee I am not as other men are.' I found it worked just as well.

Brand was at a loss at first how to send me to my 'station', for his diver was working off Turtle Island, which is nearer to Hedland than to Broome. There was therefore some talk of sending me by plane to Hedland. But that might entail a weary wait in that tiny but expensive township before I could find a lugger to take me out to the 'station'. Everyone's luggers would be liable to be out during the middle of the 'tucker', just as they were from Broome.

So my owner sent me along to the Continental Hotel to board there and wait some satisfactory solution of the transport problem. Installed there, I spent the next day exploring Roebuck Bay, where Dampier is reputed to have landed, and the beach north of it, known as Cable Bay.

Behold me then taking a walk! High in the wine of the vault circle three pompous, rose-breasted pelicans with clumsy pterodactyl-like wing-beats. A schooner's snowy sails, beating north, relieve the aching blue of the bay. Dull, shining mangrove-green adorns a point near the wire-netting-walled bathing enclosure. Behind are the low, oxide cliffs, which, when one sights them from the sea, look like smears executed with crimson chalk. As I step out along the fore-

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shore I come on fish weirs in use and in ruins. Dead fish discarded from the last catch lie about, with an occasional live one flopping in a diminishing pool as the tide recedes. Bald-headed, rusty-coated, fish-eagles police the beach for these luckless loiterers. Along the sands one comes at times on the ribs of some wrecked and half-buried lugger which forms the backbone and setting of a delightful marine garden, all green with weeds and bright with anemones, corals and delicate chrysanthemum-like worms that withdraw instantly at the vibration of one's footsteps into their tubed stems with a series of little 'clops', like living pop-guns. Here and there the sands are alive with crabs. Here and there, too, the waters are alive with irritable or skittish fishes. A turtle browses dreamily, like a marine bullock, amid the weed meadows between two strips of coral reef. Gulls glide about the fringe of the water on twinkling legs like small white beads of foam blown along by the lazy wind. Every little while they turn sideways for a second in their gliding trot, just like foam-clots on a stream, caught and deflected an instant by some snag or cross current of wind. An ibis or a spoonbill or an egret heightens the tropical effect of the turquoise sea surmounted by its heat-bleached horizon. A mile away some tall black fellows are fishing with spears among a cluster of rocks. Everything is tropical, romantic, and, to my as yet unjailed eye, uncivilized almost as when the white man first trod these strands and noted 'a sort of racoon', different from those of the West Indies, chiefly as to their legs: for these have very short fore-legs but go jumping on them as the others do and like them are very good meat.

And then what is this . . . bobbing in on that roller? A packing case marked, on closer inspection, **STOW AWAY FROM BOILERS** . . . poetry, no doubt, in this, too, for the Kipling cultured mind!

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Dampier was an accurate first impressionist. Of the thorny scrub of Australia he says, 'Most of the trees we saw were "dragon-trees"'. By which he evidently meant 'all horns and claws'; which is right, for there never was a thornier scrub than that of Australia. 'We saw no trees that bore fruit or berries', he adds. Right again! And, of the Australian fly, he remarks, 'So troublesome here that no fanning will keep them off.' Pelsart also complains, 'There were such multitudes of flies that one could not keep them out of one's eyes.' The manners of the fly population have not improved one wit since those days. These creatures have apparently solved the problem of living on nothing most of their lives. When, therefore, any animal matter presents itself, they immediately go mad with desire for it.

Dampier again speaks of the natives making 'weirs of stones across little coves or branches of the sea, every tide bringing in small fish, and there leaves them a prey to these people'. Had he remembered the fish-eagles, this once-over of Roebuck Bay by its first white observer would have been perfect.

Broome is the largest and best cared-for of the nor'-west ports; even so, it does not seem much of a place to anyone from the south. Yet I could quite imagine the nor'-wester headed south for a holiday, or the homing pearler beating in from the open sea, sighting these blood-red cliffs and green sprinkler-watered gardens with genuine enthusiasm. The town lies between the clean, sandy beach of Roebuck Bay and a mangrove skirted creek, on the sandy hummocks above the mouth of which lie the 'foreshore camps' of the pearlmen. These are humpies and sheds used for steering gear, and also as H.Q. by the crews during the Christmas 'lay-up', the dangerous season of the cyclonic willy-willies, when the luggers are beached on the mud to be overhauled. Seaward

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of the humpies is the jail where the chain-gang lodges. These prisoners, mostly black fellows, are employed on the road work, and whilst so engaged are connected by a light chain. Nor do they work too hard. Why should they? Indeed, many of them prefer the spell in jail, I was told, to freedom, since it means good tucker and regular tucker, two factors not always forthcoming in the bush. Nevertheless there is that chain. And I heard an almost incredible yarn of two escapees who stowed away *on* a northbound coaster, *not in* it, for they clung to the flukes of stern anchors tucked away out of sight, and one of them actually stuck it out till they reached the next port. His companion dropped and swam for it somewhere in between.

Landward of the white-town, with its tramline and tennis-courts, is the oriental quarter of Jap-town with its own pubs and its cinema hall. Landward again, are the wicky-ups of the blacks, many of whom find employment about the town as yardmen or labourers in the sheds where the shell is sorted and packed. They go clad in white man's dungarees and singlets, shedding them with their work when they feel an urge to go bush. The blackgin housemaids are not ill-favoured. Their eyes are invariably large and beautiful. As for the rest of them, they are not made on the lines to which the European eye is accustomed. Their beauty is of a different order.

When wandering about the scrub on the Cable Bay side of the cemetery, I came on a small collection of black fellow magical appurtenances, shaped for the most part like cross-bows. They were stuck butt-end into the ground and were adorned with rags and feathers and coloured clays. I thought at first they were burial paraphernalia but, on returning, being attracted by the sound of chanting, I found a ceremony in progress, the participants being three tall

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bucks, squatted before the instruments, stark naked save for a few daubs of paint and tufts of feathers. Here, as elsewhere, the habit of leaving people to conduct their own affairs, when not directly implicated myself, caused me to turn away lest my presence should defeat the object of the incantations in the opinions of the communicants.

Nevertheless, in the dismal, forbidding mangrove swamp at the mouth of the creek, I departed from this rule far enough to stone to death an ugly grey snake which looked exactly like some mangrove root that had writhed itself free, on mischief bent. The snake was doing me no harm, and its dark blood made a most revolting puddle in that still grey slime. However, I considered my action justified, and indeed learnt later that these grey snakes are held to be quite venomous. All for living and letting live, I have ever held 'living' to be the more important.

In these mangroves too were the scattered bones of dugongs, bleached, long dead apparently. The huge, solid skulls lent a thrilling, extinct saurian suggestion to that hot, steamy, primeval-seeming world beneath the sombre and serpentine mangrove boughs.

Three days of this sort of thing. Then the difficulty of transport was suddenly solved by one Sam Barnes, a master pearler who offered to take me with him to Turtle Island in return for a sackful of loaves. This Barnes had a store schooner in which it was his habit to visit his own luggers now working somewhere near Igashi.

Outfitted with a mattress, pillow, and 'dutch-wife', and a copy of Swetenham's Malay dictionary by way of reading matter, I went aboard with Barnes one afternoon. I had tried to purchase a Japanese grammar both in white Broome and in Jap town, but without success. In Jap town there were, however, plenty of English grammars for the use of

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Japanese students. Which seemed a natural enough arrangement when I came to think it over.

A 'dutch-wife', by the way, is a bed-appanage peculiar to the tropics. It is a long bolster which, for the seafarer at any rate, serves a double purpose. Jammed between a recumbent man's thighs and cuddled in his arms, it absorbs the sweat of his body and keeps his limbs apart, so obviating sweat-sores. Further, when there is a roll on, the dutch-wife jams a man more tightly into his bunk, thus considerably reducing the space in which to rattle around.

CHAPTER XV

THE CIRCLE OF ABRED

SAM's crew consisted of a Japanese bos'n, who had at one time been a sealer and at another had packed salmon in British Columbia, a Chinese carpenter and sailmaker, another Jap and a Beagle Bay black fellow, named Tommy.

Tommy carried a paper-covered copy of one of Nat Gould's thrillers in his pocket. When not busy, he would take this out and make a show of reading. His studies, however, consisted mostly of turning through the pages very rapidly. I supposed the type pattern fascinated him just as Chinese ideographs please a European. What held him most was the coloured cover. Whenever he sat gazing at it a melting look came into his large, liquid eyes, for all the world like the gaze a youth bends on an attractive girl. Perhaps he thought within those pages was wrapt some strong sorcery that would enable an initiate to pick the winner every time.

But those bright eyes had never been ruined by the midnight oil. From the deck, Tommy spotted a distant reef that Fujimato, the wizened old bos'n, had to climb the stays, monkey fashion, holding the wires between his big and second toes, to confirm. Our second evening out we ran into squally weather. So we snugged down head on to the wind. All turned in but the bos'n, who kept his weather eye open, for Sam was impatient and wanted to step along again as soon as it might be safe to do so. About two in the morning, Fujimato decided to upsail, so he called the crew. Followed one hell of a racket, heavy bodies falling about and

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excited shouts in unknown languages. Sam bounded up. 'Stay where you are!' was his parting injunction, as he buckled his belt. 'You can't be any use on deck. I'll call you if we're sinking.'

Sinking! We had snuggled down because of the reefs and the darkness and the high seas. The seas still seemed to me high enough in all conscience. What if we had drifted on to some reef in these cruel, shark-infested waters! I lay and quaked, wondering whether it would be wiser to pull on my clothes or kick them off. Sam's yarn the previous evening of a whale which had once followed his lugger so closely that its rank spume had been flecked over the deck did not make me feel happier. The sea, and far too many of its creatures, seemed so disproportionately vast in comparison with my small and feeble self. But my fears were groundless. Soon I heard Sam's booming laughter as he swung himself down into the well.

Then I learnt there had indeed been a serious moment, for one member of the crew and the dinghy had actually been launched in consequence. The ship's cat had fallen overboard. Tommy's sharp ears had caught pussy's despairing miaow, and his keen eyes had picked up the small head bobbing in the dark turmoil astern. A very wet cat was now crouched down in the hold among the potato and rice sacks, very, very sorry his mother raised him to be a sailor.

Simultaneously with the gallant rescue the breeze had steadied, whereupon the cook immediately attributed this good fortune to their recent humane action. 'S'pose that feller cat, he finished, you — me must all bloke up. S'pose that feller cat, me — you help 'im, must gooloo wind.' (*Gooloo meaning good.*)

In the morning of the third day we picked up Turtle Island and, in its vicinity, some half dozen luggers, one of

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which bore Brand's number on its bows. When signalled, it promptly sent a dinghy over. The boat contained a leathery little Jap, all wrinkles and dungarees, and he was considerably surprised to learn our business, for Igashi and his merry men had not dreamed their owner would get hold of a new shell-opener so quickly. This Jap seemed inclined to argue the toss at first, saying they had received no instructions to take on a shell-opener. He feared Igashi might refuse to work if he had one foisted on him without warning.

'Igashi plenty sore head. He no like that feller, Fled,' the Jap protested.

'I'll talk to Igashi,' I made bold to say and, bidding good-bye to Sam and his crew, followed my dunnage into the dinghy. But I did not feel a bit bold really. If only I had not been such a greenhorn I felt I might have been more equal to the occasion. As things were I was dependent on an apparently hostile crew for instruction in the very duties they did not want me to perform.

However, I consoled myself with the thought that, though Igashi had a reputation for independence, he was not said to be 'cheeky'. For I had already 'been given the strength of him'. In Broome, the characteristics of both divers and owners are common property. You can get a fairly accurate thumbnail sketch of any diver in any hotel bar. For every diver is important enough in his own way to every other member of that practical-minded community.

Yet the hodge-podge of stirring yarns I had imbibed had laid the seeds of a very natural uneasiness. Igashi might be a decent enough chap . . . when sober . . . still, while being ferried to my new quarters, with Brand already receding at a spanking rate to hunt for his own luggers, I could not keep my mind off one not at all reassuring anecdote.

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Briefly, some six Japanese Holidays ago, a diver, whom we will call *Maru*, had received bad news from home and had started in on a 'blind' to help him forget. Thompson, the shell-opener, had got *Maru* aboard at last, apparently in a reasonable mood once again, but actually in a state of seething rebellion against his fate and everyone connected with it. The Jap had also brought aboard a suitcase full of bottled port, with the result that he ran amok on his first Sunday out, putting the wind up everyone on board, including Thompson, who was caught by surprise, for the Jap had taken his wine for'ard to consume.

So it came about that Thompson, aroused by a trembling Koepanger from the thriller he had been peacefully reading, stepped out on deck into the middle of a real life-thriller. Drunk as a daimio, the diver crouched amidships, sharpening his knife on the ship's whetstone and muttering unpleasant promises to the Koepanger crew who were out on the jib-boom to a man, ready to swim for it.

The shell-opener pulled himself together. He approached the Jap, no doubt with a thumping heart, yet betraying no outward concern.

'What kind you make 'em?' he asked pleasantly enough.

Rolling a wild eye, *Maru* answered thickly.

'Aw, velly gooloo! To-day number one Japanese day. To-day Japan man go dessous (die) velly gooloo. To-day Japan man go dessous, more better take somebody along. To-day I go dessous. More better I take plenty along.'

Then the cool-witted Thompson received an inspiration direct from his guardian angel.

'By Cripes, you see that knife all proper sharp,' he warned. 'He no proper sharp, you not proper die. You let me see him!' Perhaps the child-like mind of the diver was really impressed with this advice, or perhaps it was the apparent

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nonchalance of this white devil that warned him a change of tactics might be advisable; at any rate, though still outwardly boastful, the drunken Jap promptly handed over the knife for inspection.

‘By Clipes, him all plopper sharp, Mr. Clerk!’

Needless to say, the ugly weapon immediately sailed overboard. At the same moment the ‘tender’, who had been hovering in the bows in not quite such pitiable panic as the Koepangers, leapt like a cat upon his countryman’s back, securing him at once with some paralysing ju-jitsu hold.

An awkward situation efficiently handled by a man who was obviously worth his eight pounds a month and tucker. But how would I have made out under the circumstances? At this juncture I certainly wished I had never heard that yarn.

And, when I stepped aboard to be greeted with a sullen ‘Gooloo monning!’ from the diver, who was just up for a spell, and thereafter to be ignored by that worthy, I did certainly feel a bit awkward. It was not even as though I knew my duties, and could get on with them at once in unconcern as magnificent as that of the diver.

Igashi was a tall man for a Jap, about five feet nine, handsome too in a sullen way. He sat there in his diving dress (all but the helmet which was replaced by a Homburg hat), smoking a cigarette and listening in broody silence to the report of the man who had ferried me over. Another Jap, a short, powerful, deep-chested fellow with a much darker skin than either of the others, stood smiling amiably, almost vacantly, with one fat walrus-fin of a naked foot on the helm. This was evidently Igashi’s ‘tender’, who held his life-line and was second in command. The fellow’s expression was so bashful and his voice pitched in such a thin, falsetto key that he made me think of that walloping

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wench of my Rocky Mountain days, Mary Two-Young-Men. His short toes were almost hidden in the phenomenal layer of blubber which gave his feet their flipper-like aspect. His squat nose and long thin wiry moustache, drooping around his coarse, good-natured mouth, in real Old Bill fashion, made his face just like one of those smiling masks one sees in curio shops. This Old Man of the Sea's grin never came off and, strange to say, among all the men afflicted that way I have ever met, he was the only one whose unvarying smile really indicated unvarying good-nature

Besides these three Japs, there were four Koepangers, natives of an island in the Dutch Indies which supplies most of the crews for the nor'-west grounds on time-limit indentures. They are for the most part merry, light-hearted souls, rather poor-spirited in a tight corner, but willing enough when everything is going right.

A pile of some twenty pearl oysters, with weed and coral-crusted shells some seven or eight inches in diameter, lay on the deck near the starboard mainstays where they had been dumped out of the diver's string bag, a lobster-pot-like contraption in which he carries his spoil as he collects it from the sea-bottom.

I was now initiated into the mysteries of 'opening', by one of the crew, who first trimmed the shells of their marine growths with a tomahawk and then showed me the right place to attack the oyster with my knife, which spot is almost diametrically opposite the valve hinges. One then feels in the soft flesh for possible pearls, which are not easy to miss. Any mother of pearl blisters on the shell walls must also be set aside. They may be valuable as blisters solely, or may be cut open on the chance of their containing pearls. It is best to save them as blisters, if one is a green hand.

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It was early apparent to me that considerable skill would be required to get away with a pearl in real 'thriller' story fashion, especially with a lynx-eyed shell-trimmer at one's elbow. Any sudden movement of the hand towards one's mouth, the only place of immediate concealment, would instantly arouse suspicions, and no opportunity to search one's effects would thereafter be neglected. So I decided that pearl-stealing as a profession could be safely left to prestidigitateurs. I, myself, could earn a steadier income by writing about it. Yet, even for the man with perfectly honest intentions, there cannot fail to be a slight thrill in the very fumbling in the flesh of each oyster he opens. There is always the chance that a fortune for the owner and a small fortune for the opener may lie muffled between those slimy flounces. Of course, what feels excitingly like a pea usually reveals itself as of caraway-seed or even pinhead size. Yet the thrill is always there, even when the nervous system is in a state of mutiny through heat and lack of exercise or, as in my case, from uneasiness occasioned by slight but infallible symptoms that my asthma was already thinking up objections to this mode of life.

The sulky Igashi staged a little surprise for me that first evening. It happened this way. I ate my supper in solitary state, as was apparently customary, aft in the cabin, the diver eating for'ard with the crew. During their meal I heard them talking excitedly, but thought nothing of it. However, a little later, just as I had settled to read, the cabin was suddenly invaded by the three Japs, all in a distinct state of jazz-up, whilst the Koepangers also crowded, jabbering in the well outside, to peer through the door.

Igashi, holding a newly-opened Japanese newspaper in his hand, for Sam had brought their mail out, pointed with an

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eager finger at a glaring headline and started to gabble with a sort of suppressed fury which gave me no time to ask why the devil my privacy had been so rudely invaded.

After listening patiently for a minute or so, I gathered the recent expulsion of the Japs from U.S.A. was the primary root of this ill-mannered descent on myself. The paper said, and in scare headlines apparently, that war was inevitable. It had probably called on the nation to wipe out this deadly insult in blood. Its readers, in spite of the hereditary calm of their expressions, had become hysterical enough to satisfy the most progressive editor. And here was I, who thoroughly sympathized with Japan's, if not with the editor's, irritation, being called upon to defend America's action or show them the reason why. A light opera situation aboard a forty-foot lugger! I suppose I should have become severely official and ordered all hands, except Igashi, who had a right to be there, out of the cabin. Instead I burst out laughing. Had I had enough pidgin English at my disposal I might have offered to start a drill class for intending volunteers.

But my laughter only irritated Igashi all the more. Last Sunday, I gathered, when visiting another lugger, he had heard that declaration of war was only a matter of a few hours. This, coming on top of his victory over the egregious Fred, had thoroughly confirmed his rebellious mood. He suspected part of his mail had been kept back. He itched for definite war news and he quite believed his white employer capable of hushing up the information so as to keep him at his fishing right up to the last moment. Obviously he longed to rush off right away, enlist and wallow in war-fever, resplendent in a real uniform with brass buttons. His eager face betrayed, in the fitful light of the swinging hurricane lantern, just those very emotions which must have animated my own ingenuous countenance beneath the arc lamp out-

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side the recruiting station one evening just a decade ago to the very month.

So I stopped laughing and recollected that it was my job to keep these men contentedly at work till the end of the tucker. Also here I perceived an opportunity to assert my authority, such as it was, once for all, if I could only manage it. So patiently, in painfully inadequate pidgin, I set myself to explain.

- (a) That so far as I knew there was no war on, nor likelihood of war.
- (b) If there were, the Jap government would see that they got back quite soon enough to get their bellyful of fighting.
- (c) Australia had nothing to do with U.S.A.
- (d) No one but a half wit ever got jazzed up over newspaper rumours; that might be all right for land-lubbers; but sailors didn't care.
- (e) It was customary for crew and tender to knock and ask permission before entering the cabin. Would they please go home and let me get on with my book.

When the above had sunk in, it served to dash the excitement considerably, though I could still hear the buzz of animated conversation for an hour after they had withdrawn. Then Igashi came back and got into his bunk without a word, to continue his feast on month-old journealese. He asked no more questions, but presently gave me quite a civil good-night. Thereafter he was, if not exactly matey, at least inoffensive.

In the Broome latitude there is very little variation in the time of sunrise all the year round. Within a quarter hour of 6 a.m. the sun rises, almost immediately asserting his authority with undue severity, which state of opposition

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continues until within a quarter of 6 p.m., when he suddenly dives down just as if an impatient hand had snatched him beneath the horizon. With the exception of one short half hour at sunrise and another half hour at sunset, the whole tropic day is one huge, lazy afternoon; and most of that seemingly endless period the diver spends below, making the utmost of the hours of daylight. The Japanese constitution stands this strain better even than those of Manilla natives or Chinese. Hence the business popularity of the Jap diver. Caucasians are a long way out of the running, while the Australian aboriginal can only be employed for naked work.

The Japs are hired on a retaining salary and commission. The commission accounts for their industry. The large sums they earn and their appreciation of their indispensability accounts for their independence. Their coolie-like culture accounts for their extravagant habits when ashore and for their 'cheek', the latter being much aggravated by their not unnatural sense of grievance against the white man for his assumption of authority and his indubitable efficiency in asserting that authority. To combat exploitation by the Great White Wolf, the Japs of Broome have resorted to labour union tactics. So numerous are they in comparison with their white owners that this union, or 'club', as they call it, by its ever-increasing demands for privileges, has gone a long way towards crippling the pearling industry; for the extravagant Jap coolie takes small account of the fact that it is white capital and enterprise which has created that industry, thus providing the yellow divers with a far more profitable source of income than their own people can offer them. All the diver cares about is that he is the king-pin in the executive side of the machine, capable of extorting from it an income of, say, £600 a year. He is also aware that the

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dangerous side of the business is also all his, and the fact that this is not intended as a compliment, but solely as an exploitation of his constitutional ability, is apt to escape him. He is the diver, the darling of Jap town, because he comes ashore with good money for the annual Christmas fleecing. Is he to be blamed if this last consideration goes to his head?

Anyway, the Jap diver, whatever his faults, is a worker. Just before dawn the lugger is astir. First come ablutions with salt water, administered by tilted bucket over the naked body. Then the diver dresses himself in his warm pyjama-like underclothes, over which goes his rubber dress which has hung all night from the stays, like the shell of a bloated robot. Having got his hands and feet through the skintight elastic cuffs and ankles with the aid of grease, he pauses for a cup of tea, after which he dons his lead boots; his helmet is adjusted by the crew under the supervision of the tender and, by 6.30, it being now light enough for work below, he drops backwards off his little ladder slung amidships on the port side. He may come up once or twice before breakfast at 7 a.m., but, after breakfast, he rises only at intervals of about an hour, unless, of course, he has filled his bag earlier. His spell above is a mere 'smoko' of ten minutes or less, just time for a whiff of tobacco smoke flavoured with fresh air. Then down again for another period, and so on till the lunch hour, which is a bare hour and no more. At sundown he comes up for the last time, gets out of his dress and his sweat-sodden underclothes whilst the decks are being swabbed, has another bucket bath, gets into his pyjamas and eats his supper. Another hour's 'smoko', yarning on deck with the crew, or lying reading in his bunk, then, winding his alarm clock, he turns over to sleep. Close upon twelve tropic hours in his dress, maybe nine and a half below the sea: hardly a lazy man's day! Even so, Igashi did not sleep too soundly, and would

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wake in the night to light a cigarette, a habit of his which caused me great uneasiness, for, in the tiny cabin, I got the full benefit of his spare smoke every time, and my throat and lungs were not slow to register distress. Yet how could I ask a man to stop smoking just because I had a rather bad cough? Thus, whenever he lit up I used to dive out on deck, often into a heavy dew, which was pretty near as hard to breathe as the acrid tobacco smoke.

The tender is usually an old diver. The simple Matsumoto, however, Igashi's human walrus, had never been a diver. Mitsutani, the other Jap, now a mere 'crew', had one time been a pretty good diver in spite of his small stature. 'Lungs buggle up!' was his laconic explanation of his fallen estate, and it *was* a fall, too, and no mistake, for a 'crew' gets a bare £2 a month and tucker.

Hand-pump luggers carry one diver, one tender, and a crew of five, two being at the pumps continually, whilst another holds the pipe. The other two crew are off duty meanwhile, except when needed to handle the sheets. They spend their time fishing with handlines, laughing and yarn-ing. Every word uttered is apparently an excruciatingly witty sally, for they do even more laughing than chattering.

One of the crew takes on the duties of cook each week. This does not exempt him from his other duties. The cook draws stores from the diver or the opener and, having sifted the weavils out, cooks his rice and flour on a sort of huge navvy's devil amidships, using peeled mangrove sticks as fuel. The crew and diver eat mainly rice, either plain or curried, with tinned meat added. The evening meal usually includes fresh fish. They also drink large quantities of tea. Some of the crew, never having had a square meal in their own country, are assiduous in their attempts to make up for lost time. Hence the disease known as *beri-beri*, which comes

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from stuffing the stomach with polished rice. Unpolished rice contains vitamins which prevent this, but the luggers carry only the polished variety.

The opener has a tucker locker of his own, with tinned fare, such as pilchards, sausages, sheeps' tongues and canned fruits. He hands his food to the cook for preparation. Although opener's tucker is regarded as very good and is certainly expensive, the heat makes everything unappetizing except fresh fish. The water, too, always begins to taste stale a day or two after each refilling of the tanks, an operation which is performed about every fortnight.

In a forty-foot lugger there is no room for any sanitary fixtures. You have to hang over the side, or else you can climb out on the jib-boom, where, if there is any sea on, the waves douse you with every plunge, so that you are liable to feel a bit nervous about sharks. The sucker fish which travel with the lugger, cruising around for offal, can give a man a bad scare, for they look exactly like young sharks. Cockroaches gnaw one's toenails at night. Rats and mice scamper over one. Sandflies are sometimes troublesome, but there are no mosquitoes when you are at sea, though the brutes make the most of their opportunities when you are laid up in a creek. Such are some of the discomforts of an opener's life . . . in fact, the above list comprises the lot in normal weather. As an offset, I found certain advantages. No cooking to do. No hard bullocking and no yapping white men to distract one's thoughts, for the chatter of the crew, being unintelligible, is easily ignored. From one point of view it is the greatest mistake in the world to be in a hurry to learn the language of the people you find yourself among. As soon as you understand their nonsense it becomes an instrument of torture, whereas, while still devoid of meaning, it retains a certain glamour. Why anyone ever wanted to learn the

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language of birds I can't imagine. Altogether, I decided, this life would be ideal for a young man not blessed with too much power of concentration, who contemplated sitting for an exam. Any amount of time to study and no distractions, for the opener's duties rarely occupy more than three hours of even the busiest day, unless he is employed on a fleet, when he is rowed around in a dinghy from lugger to lugger, getting no more salary for this extra work though, but, of course, standing increased chances of finding a big 'stone'.

The manner of fishing employed by Igashi is known as 'drifting'. When the diver is down, the tender assumes command, standing at the tiller which he controls with his bare foot, his hands on the life-line. The lugger drifts along under jib and mainsail, or mainsail alone, according to the strength of the wind, towing the diver slowly along the bottom, unless he signals for more rope, when the tender immediately pays out, likewise the pipeman: or maybe the diver signals for more speed; in which case the tender has the jib run right or part way up. The diver's track can be marked by the bubbles and the peculiarly smooth rings of water that surround them. In calm water he can be clearly seen when near the boat, leaning forward like a horse straining on the collar.

In fact, in clear and shallow water, I found I could see the bottom probably almost as well as the diver himself, and could note the oysters, where partly exposed from sand and weeds. Mitsutani, when off duty, would sometimes peel off his pants to slip suddenly over the side and down through the clear water, reappearing with a cheery grin and a shell clasped in his hand. This is what is known as 'naked' diving. In the early days it was the only method, and aboriginals were found to be very good at it.

When the diver signals that he is about to rise, the tender

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yelps 'come up', to warn the crew. With inflated dress the diver breaks surface and is hauled in, floating on his face like some weird sea monster, to the little ladder, so that he can set his feet on its bottom rung: then he is yanked upright by the crew. His helmet and breastplate are swiftly removed, and he stamps on board in his lead shoes to sit down on the cabin roof for his smoko. The lugger is now put about and races back with what wind there is to the other end of the patch of shell.

His cigarette finished, the diver calls, 'Down jib!' and stamps back on to the ladder. The tender puts the boat about into the wind. One of the crew dips the helmet to test if the air is coming freely. This done, it and the breastplate are again adjusted and screwed down, the diver takes his string bag in his left hand and falls once more backwards into the water. The pumps are turned fast at first, but in a few seconds are slacked off.

Meanwhile the shell-opener has taken his knife and seated himself in the starboard scuppers ready to perform his not too arduous duties. The discarded oysters are the perquisites of the crew, who dry them on wires strung between the stays. Eventually they are shipped to China as 'delicacies'. They make a poor kind of soup, but perhaps Chinese cooking is better able to cope with them.

Igashi's lift might be anything from twenty to one hundred and eighty 'fish' a day. 'Shell' fishing is done in off-shore water, rarely more than three to five miles out, except where there are shoals. 'Pearl' fishing is done in deeper water and is carried on usually by luggers fitted with engine pumps, in which case two divers can descend at once. Only the fittest men can stand the deep-water work. Five to ten tons of shell is a fair season's take for one man.

I made several verses in which I tried to suggest that

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strange under-water world in which the diver spends his days. Of course, I was not in a position to imagine the reactions of a Japanese mentality to such an environment, so I did not try. I give one set of these verses here. A couple of years later they earned me a fiver in a competition, 'so they must be good'.

THE PEARL

From the moon-married sea,
Bearing her mystery,
 Come I, a gem,
By some sea-secret change,
Wrought in a creature strange.

Uncouth the house I share,
Far from the sunlit air,
 Humble its walls,
Save where some coral stem,
Masking, emblazons them.

Yet in my heart are laid
Keys to each light and shade
 In the sky's ken:
High-noon and vesper-fall,
Day-dawn, I conjure all.

Garish cupidity
Into dim cruelty,
 Deft, daring, dips.
Apotheosis then
Know I from fish to men.

P E T E R L E C K Y

Triple-jawed monsters prey
Where my whole world was a
 Gulf greenly gaping.
Greed all existence grips.
Buy I now Beauty's lips.

Judgment is not with me:
Land lust or savage sea,
 Each fiercely raping.
Bait of the gods am I,
Fishing from out the sky.

The days passed swiftly enough because everything was new to me. It was a never-ending delight to kneel in the scuppers on the shady side of the mainsail and peer down through the glass-clear water at the sea-floor, with its coral gardens alive with brilliant hued fishes, darting, questing leisurely, or hovering to browse. Beautiful anemones, vivid weeds and graceful sponges flourished in those marine gardens. Sea-snakes with flat oar-blade tails undulated to the surface for air or dived again like five-foot lengths of zebra-marked ribbon. Others were covered with sultana spots like plum-duffs rolled out to pipe-thinness. These sea-snakes are poisonous but not pugnacious. When caught and flayed they make beautiful belts.

Under the keel lurked the scavenging sucker-fish, darting out whenever anything was dumped, and attaching themselves to steal free rides whenever the lugger got any speed up. The crew's handlines were often robbed by these parasites, who would occasionally prove indiscreet enough to get hooked themselves, in which event the Koepangers with childish cruelty would get their own back by chopping the marauders with a tomahawk, not with intent to kill im-

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mediately but to torture by the 'death of the thousand cuts'. Animals have no feelings as far as the coloured peoples of the nor'-west are concerned. They are either live food or amusing toys to be pulled to pieces by wanton children.

The crayfish, for instance, which the diver occasionally brought up, were sometimes put on the fire in cold water to boil in what, I believe, is also the approved fashion of the white gourmet. But if they did not fit the pot they were just pruned alive of their legs and whiskers till they *did* fit. Another favourite way of cooking them was to chop into cutlets (alive as usual and starting from the tail end) and serve fried. These crayfish, by the way, are a delicacy much appreciated by sharks, who hang about the holes they inhabit attracted by the smell. Along comes an unwary diver, slips his hand into the hole, hooks out the delicacy, and, *hey presto*, off comes his hand at the wrist to disappear into the shark's gullet. Evidently Igashi was not an unwary diver, but he was taking chances all the same, even though a shark is easily scared by a sudden discharge of bubbles from the diver's exhaust.

Far more dangerous than sharks are the ferocious giant rock-cod and the diamond-fish, a large sting-ray shaped creature with thorns along its spine. These spines it is liable to hook in the diver's dress, inflicting a tear which, like Mercutio's wound, though 'not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door', unless the diver is hauled up mighty quickly, 'will serve'. As it is the deep-water diver who most often meets this horror, the chances of survival are small. There is also danger from giant clams and from falling into submarine holes, some of which are comparable to precipices on shore. In spite of the increasing rarity of fatal accidents, the diver is literally one who goes down into hell to earn his daily bread, for the ocean is one seething pit of ceaseless

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and indescribably ferocious warfare. To appreciate this grim fact, a very short sojourn at sea in a lugger amply suffices. The nearer you are to the surface, the greater the thrill. It is like being in the front seats of the Roman amphitheatre. So what must it be like down in the arena?

For instance, once, when watching the horizon where some whales were blowing, I was afforded the stupendous and unforgettable thrill of seeing one of the monsters hurl itself absolutely clear of the water, to land again with a flop that would have swamped us if we had been anywhere near. Even viewed from a liner that sight would be liable to stick in a man's memory. That whale was not leaping for fun either. He was in flight from his enemies, the 'killers'. Everything in the sea, except of course the oyster and her serene, finless and limbless sisterhood, is in agonized flight from something else during the most of its existence. The pursuit of the Lord of the Deep by killers is typical of the ferocious warfare everywhere and eternally apparent in these teeming tropic seas.

On those not rare occasions when the lugger ran into shoals of fish, all hands off duty could not haul them in quick enough, though there might be half a dozen hooks on each line. At times, all over the surface, literally for miles, schools can be seen leaping clear of the waves, either pursuing or pursued by other species. When, as again sometimes happens, the air is thick with sea-birds, swooping upon the leaping fish and screaming over their prey, the magnificent ferocity of the holocaust stuns the imagination. This is no cock-fight, nor badger-baiting, nor bull-fight, nor even a Roman holiday. It can only compare with the European battlefields towards the end of the Great War, when the air was thick with fighting planes, duelling in flocks simultaneously with the havoc below. The swooping terns further

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enhance the battle-scene effect by smiting the water into snowy fountains as they drop like miniature shells, exploding among milling armies clad in brightly gleaming silver mail.

Keen, vivid, flashing beauty everywhere . . . everywhere fighting, everywhere spawning beneath that vigour-dispensing sun! Savage, ravenous, swift, efficient, and murderously beautiful children of Proteus! Even in the less crowded hours the universal destruction goes on. Often, when peering into the hyaline waters, I could see some dead thing lying on the gleaming sand, its up-turned belly hardly discernible from that gleam if it were not for the savage tugs and nudges administered to the bobbing corpse by its busy sextons, the flensing-clawed crabs and the tiny darting fishes like minute flaying knives, flashing out of the crannies in the coral.

Years later, my indestructible memories of this terrific and unceasing holocaust were to place me thoroughly in tune with the beliefs of our Celtic ancestors, for I then read for the first time of the Circle of Abred, in which, as the Druids taught, all terrestrial life works out its problem of salvation in perpetual and remorseless warfare. And, just as the flaming peaks of the Rockies at sunrise had proved my version of the Grail, so now, in retrospect, I reviewed these tropic seas as one vast cauldron where evolution worked its equations in a seething potholder of murder. The ocean is the sphere where death for the individual, and consequent promotion for the survivors, comes quickest. The Druids apparently held that the slain individual also benefited by swift elimination, thereby winning another step on the ladder of transmigration, till eventually each individual soul attained to manhood and choice between good and evil. Even here, death in just warfare meant eventual promotion to the angelic ministry, for to fall in the service of one's

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country was to enter the gateway to emancipation from Death. There have been worse creeds. For, when all is said and done, surely it is not battle that brutalizes, but greed and hatred, and of these ugly qualities, judging by my modest four years' experience of him, I consider the fighting man harbours little or nothing. Further, if I may venture a crude prophecy, I will say that the creed of the Druids is far from dead in the hearts of the peoples, nor has it outlived its time as an effective instrument in the service of mankind.

CHAPTER XVI

I TAKE THE COUNT

THERE came a day when Igashi lifted only twenty-seven shells. Looking down, I noticed a milkiness about the sea-floor, which destroyed all details as effectively as a fog blankets a river. The spring tides were making the grounds unworkable. It was time to run for a creek to replenish the water cask and enjoy a few days' 'dry-shelling' on the beach. Dry-shelling is the process of picking shells from reefs exposed by the receding tides. It is really the same work as the diver does under water, now performable under easier conditions.

Igashi decided to run for Condon at the south end of Eighty Mile Beach, a big sweeping bay between Broome and Hedland, also known locally as Ninety Mile, so that it can be comfortably confused with the beach of that name in New Zealand.

That night the lugger ran till a late hour before a stiff breeze, getting under way again at dawn, so that midday saw us treading the reefs at the entrance to Condon Creek with more caution than dignity, as is the way with the little yellow men and their brown crews when feeling their road into an anchorage on these coasts where the shoals are ever shifting. Much yelping, ordering and countermanding, and heroic haulings of all hands on the warping ropes eventually got us moored to the mangroves a few yards from the crazy jetty, which together with a small wool shed is the only sign of humanity visible from seaward on that desolate coast of sand hummocks and mangrove swamps. Landward of the

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jetty, an army of empty bottles, and a wagon track winding off into nowhere now revealed themselves. The bottles are the sole relics of a once flourishing camp complete with pub: for these frail glass receptacles, iridescent from exposure to the weather, manage to survive the less fragile wreckage of an abandoned camp; and for a very good reason. They are not worth souveniring. Omar's lines therefore, if translated by an Australian, might very well have read:

'They say the bottle and the lizard keep
The site where diggers boasted and drank deep.'

Or, as Matsumoto succinctly summed up the matter, in quite a creditable imitation of free verse:

'House all same empty. One time plenty people stop.
To-day nobody stop. House buggle up!'

As the lugger had neared the shore, the patent dreariness of the sand-duned coast had been relieved by the fringing beard of mangroves about the creek mouth, visible as broken green lines ruled by the inevitable mirage slightly above themselves, as it were. Nearer yet, and the baked and bare hillocks had revealed a stunted and twisted tree, under the scanty but grateful shade of which a herd of snowy fleeced goats lay basking. As we crawled past, the bright deceitfully fresh-looking green of the leaf sprays afforded a marked relief to the eye already wearied of the harsh shiny mangrove foliage in the foreground, and the glaring red and yellow dunes behind.

With a rattle, the anchor now finds the creek bed and the jib is lowered simultaneously, so that the lugger swings round to the swiftly racing flood. The ever-ready Mitsutani leaps overboard with a line and, braving possible sharks, which are always partial to creek mouths, swims to a mangrove

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bole and makes fast. Now commences that heroic warping mentioned above. All hands strain on the line while the swimmer returns and repeats the manœuvre, choosing another stump. Four lines are used as moorings, reinforced by anchors fore and aft, for the tide here is no trifling concern.

Waters of aching blue, shimmering heat over arid red earth, relieved at one spot, and one only, by that green peppercorn tenting its snow-white goats . . . we might be seamen of some ancient Mediterranean folk, 'sea-stray seed of Apollo', come to our moorings in this primeval rule of thumb fashion. Now, on the bank, a tall bearded aboriginal accompanied by a naked piccaninny appears to supply the final touch of resemblance. Resemblance? Surely, for this half-wild son of wholly wild parents has the broad flattened wide-nostrilled nose, the wide-gashed mouth, the tousled ringlets, the goaty beard, the swarthy skin, the dark faunal eyes, and even the slender-muscle sheep-shanks of the classic satyr; while the piccaninny might well be a baby faun slipped wide-eyed and warm-skinned straight off some painted vase. And indeed it is now recognized by ethnologists that there is a deep substratum of the Australoid beneath our European races, a matrix which sometimes outcrops even to-day in its original form, bearing all those traits which Greek myth has embodied in its satyrs. Here, then, is that underworld to which the main satyr rout has fled, leaving long misinterpreted, myth-distorted memories in its old-world nursery. The suns of millenniums have deepened this people's pigmentation. Otherwise they appear entirely unaltered; unless indeed one looks into their eyes and searches deeper. Then it is possible one may detect something else, something shared by, and visible in, the eyes of the emu, something which seemingly reflects the essence

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of this austral landscape which has modelled them, and from whose dust they are sprung and by it nourished. Then one perceives that these satyrs have altered their allegiance in their age-long travels. Their lord and master is no longer the Arcadian goatfoot. They are the adopted children of another and yet older Pan. Spengler's soul of the landscape is here patently in operation, and the proof of it, for me, is that I had never heard of Spengler or his theories at the time when this thing became obvious to me.

By the time all is snug, the flood has been spent some while and the ebb has already revealed the amphibious roots of the mangroves. What was but recently a swamp of submerged shrubs is now seen to be a gloomy tangled forest, the slimy, soap-grey floor of which is runnelled with tiny cataracts by the ebbing waters. The smooth grey bark of the trees is freely coated with colonies of small but knife-edge oysters. Razor-edged, too, are the ten-inch razor shells perpendicularly hidden in the mud to slash unwary feet. The young mangrove shoots also, peeping up like asparagus heads from the slime, are sharp and hard as fire-tempered wooden darts. Not at all a pedestrian's paradise! Nor one for asthmatics, as the steamy atmosphere had already informed me! Even my short walk among the mangroves at Broome had tightened my breathing unpleasantly. Here it got me right away, and within ten minutes of our mooring I was wheezing like a broken-winded horse. This was the first severe spasm I had experienced up north. It frightened me badly. Once the thing got a grip I should be finished as far as ability to discharge my job was concerned. I knew the brute. Day and night it would maintain its grip till, in a few weeks at most, I would be a wreck, worn out for want of sleep and nourishment. It was now the end of September. How on earth was I going to stick it out till the second week in November,

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when the season would close? Two more weeks, perhaps, I gave myself . . . but it was certain that the extra month till the lay-up would be as impossible a proposition for me to tackle as, say, climbing a cliff with two broken arms. This needed thinking out. Perhaps if I got ashore and up on to the dunes I might obtain temporary relief. Anything would be better than these foul mangroves.

I called one of the crew from his lazy task of fishing. Chattering and tittering, he disengaged the lines from his fingers and toes, rose to his feet and came over to me. Wheezing painfully, I told him what I wanted, and was forthwith pickabacked over the mud to the shore. The Koepanger seemed to think my wheeze was a huge joke. It was almost as amusing, judging from the roars of laughter that broke out when he returned to his comrades, as the squirmings of a dying catfish.

I gained the top of a bank at last, and sat down to rest. If I kept still for a while, the cough might let up. This was the very devil. What was I to do? Igashi had told me there was a lonely telegraph station, hidden by those dunes, but not so very far away. Should I wire Brand to send another opener to relieve me? That would be too absurd. He would never understand. He might even think Igashi had scared me into quitting. Of course, I had told him of my asthma, but I had made light of it as a thing of the past, as indeed it had seemed to be only a few weeks ago. What a fool I had been to leave shore before I had tested myself out in this climate. Oh well, curse it! I just would *have* to stick it out. That was all there was to it. There was just a chance I might manage it. (From which it may be guessed that the fit was passing. Indeed, I was now feeling pretty good, for that's the way my sort of asthma tricks one. The contrast afforded by freedom from a spasm is always accompanied by false hopes.) That was

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settled then. I would stick it out as long as I could, but it would mean the old, sickening game of appealing to other men's sympathy. I had that wound in my chest to show. I would tell my coloured men my sickness was due to this wound. They would understand that probably, and make allowances. Not that I expected them to make me comfortable. All I wanted was to maintain that due authority which I had so far managed to assert in spite of that wretched Fred's previous undermining influence. If I had to be carried about at times, they would know it was because I was a 'buggle-up' soldier. So long as I did not have to exert myself I might possibly get away with it.

Having arrived at this decision I felt better. I was now joined by Igashi, toggged up to the nines in a clean white drill suit and American blob-toed shoes, his going-ashore clothes. On the Jap's head was a new Homburg hat, and round his waist a brilliant cummerbund. He was off to visit the telegraph clerk, who also kept a store. A handy store is an irresistible lure to divers. The storekeeper might have some trash that they might not have sampled before. As with my former Red Indian friends, money with the Jap coolies is made to spend, not to hoard. A man might die some painful death next week and be food for crabs at the sea bottom. And, of course, I knew and sympathized with the feeling. Had I not acted in the same way when on leave during the War? Well, good luck to him! I decided to go along too, if only to dissuade him from buying a gramophone. That would be the last straw!

Following a sandy track littered with empty bottles and the bones of sheep and kangaroos, and yet more bottles for about a mile, we came to the telegraph station. This office and house with its shed and windmill was ninety miles from the nearest settlement southward and close upon two hun-

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dred from that to the north. It was linked with the 'Government Houses' of two sheep stations, each barely eighteen miles away. This agent lived here with his wife and children and, at the moment, his wife's sister, a pleasant young woman from Perth.

I was warmly welcomed, enjoying afternoon tea on the shady side of the veranda. The diver, to his ill-disguised chagrin, was given tea by himself on the further veranda. The crew, who had straggled after us, were given a kettle and a screw of tea and invited to brew themselves a drink in the yard. The secret of Igashi's shore clothes was now out. He had heard of the presence of the agent's sister-in-law from the other Japs, and he wished to cut a dash. Hope springs eternal, even in the yellow breast exiled in oriental-abhorring Australia!

As we sat on the veranda we watched the weary drought-emaciated stock, mostly horses and asses, trailing up to the troughs of a station mill a hundred yards away, each beast in its own cloud of choking dust. There was no frolicking of heels nor tossing of heads, though many of these yearlings were of good blood, for the station owners were keen racing men and owned several fine sires. The poor creatures seemed almost too weary to plod through the toilsome sand, let alone trot or frisk. The only beasts which showed any energy were the telegraph linesman's oat-fed ponies and a pair of camels.

Igashi, still determined to assert himself somehow, after being forced to waste those resplendent duds on the desert air, now approached the agent, demanding mutton. He would buy a sheep for himself and the crew. The agent accordingly rang up the station manager, asking permission to sell a wether if anything with meat on its bones came in to water. The manager had a sore head however, cursed all

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pearlers, and particularly divers, over the 'phone, and refused to sell anything. Whereupon the agent most generously gave Igashi a young goat, in with the old rooster, for which the diver paid half a dollar. These were dispatched, protesting vigorously, down to the lugger in charge of the crew. But Igashi lingered. Perhaps he yet hoped for a glimpse of the white women, feeling assured that if only he could catch their eyes, his figure and his suit would do the rest. Perhaps he hoped the agent had more appetizing fallals hidden away in the store other than those on exhibition and would bring them to light if worried long enough. At length, catching sight of a drawing in an English paper, advertising a gold watch, he desired the agent to cable forthwith to England ordering him one by the next mail. Being told that this was quite out of the question, he at last moved sullenly away in the direction of the creek.

When the moon is risen like a bloodshot eye over the mangroves, and the sickly sweet air is heavy with the thick night dew, the Koepangers butcher the goat and flay it by the light of a hurricane lantern, while the rooster flaps about in helpless terror on his tether at the mainstays, or crouches, feathers a-heckle, tapping the deck mechanically and monotonously with his beak.

On the bank by the jetty a half-caste boundary rider and two binghi youngsters roast mangrove crabs on a camp fire . . . Cancer and Capricorn and a moon like the eye of Polyphemus, and altars areek with the sickly sweet mangrove smoke! The runnels gurgle and chuckle, and mud gobbets continually break away from the banks to fall with loud splashes and plops into the stream. The stranded lugger heels over more and more till movement on board is as difficult as mountaineering and all loose gear slides to listward.

Matsumoto, the illiterate, is making manful efforts to read

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a Japanese fairy tale profusely decorated with drawings of heroes and dragons. Every little while he has to get Igashi to help him out with a difficult word. Igashi lies in his bunk reading a Japanese translation of an English detective tale. I recognize it by the illustrations, which have been lifted from an English magazine. It is Chesterton's *Adventures of Father Brown*. And all the time Igashi is smoking those terrible cigarettes, driving me out on to the deck where the terror-palsied rooster keeps up his mesmeric tapping, while the dismembered joints of the goat drip blood from the fore-stays. Now we have the big feed to which the crew have been looking forward. Fried liver, very tasty by the smell, but my throat refuses everything but a pannikin of coffee. After that, all turn in but myself and the rooster. I lean, wheezing, against the cabin roof, to stare at the now almost day-bright moon, or examine the pictures in some magazines, finding it quite easy to read the captions in this extraordinary light. At intervals my head drops on my arms and I get a little sleep. It isn't comfortable here by any means, but far preferable to complete suffocation below. I have never spent so horrible a night, nor one amidst such rich material for reverie.

At length the tide turns. Back come the racing waters. The lugger rights herself, slowly at first, then with a series of jerks, and then one final shuddering spurt: soon the water is deep enough for some heavily breathing thing, which sounds like a snoring man, to plough upstream under our bows. I strain my eyes but cannot make out its shape . . . a dugong perhaps. As the channels fill, the gurglings and wranglings diminish and the riotous babblings of the tide race grow fainter and fainter, like a carnival rout that has racketed off into some distant quarter. The mangrove forest is rapidly submerged as the grey light of dawn replaces the till just now blinding moon.

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Teuks, terns, and whimbrels rise and shriek. Bitterns boom. Piping music sprays from the reeds and mangrove tops while, on the still exposed mudbanks, spoonbills, pelicans, ibis, and dainty white egrets are plumbing the grey mud for their breakfasts. A large white crane, the *broлга* or *native companion*, fishes by himself with real 'bushy' independence. Crows, fish-hawks, and little darting kingfishers supply an active 'go-getter' interest counterbalanced by the hush-hush *motif* sustained by lamenting doves in a mist-wreathed Japanesey middle distance. Who would guess, coming on this creek at midday, it could be haunted by all this life? Not one of these birds will be visible or audible a quarter of an hour after sunrise.

Igashi knows this. Suddenly he appears with his shotgun and fires both barrels 'into the brown', or rather into the 'pink and white, those being the dominant colours. Then he sends two of the crew to pick up the spoils of his prowess, two terns and a snowy ibis, fluttering and flopping in painful spasms on the quivering, shiny-grey mud. Igashi is very pleased with his shooting. It proves him, so far as the power to destroy goes, 'all same white man'. In a spasm of generosity he makes to offer me the gun, so that I too may exhibit my prowess. I am about to refuse, for I certainly don't want to kill anything, when a hawk comes cruising overhead and, as luck will have it, chooses a spot nearby to pounce upon some reed-hidden quarry. Here was deserving quarry. I grabbed the gun and waited. In a few seconds the hawk appeared again with some small thing clutched in his talons. It was a long shot, but I got him, and he tumbled back into the reeds showering feathers as he fell. I was glad to have had this small opportunity to re-establish that threatened prestige.

Just after sunrise two more luggers enter the creek. One carries a white shell-opener, an old grey-bearded fellow with

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a cultivated voice and steady, bleached-blue eyes. He has lived in the nor'-west a long, long time, he tells me, over a game of crib and a pannikin of ship's limejuice. His cabin is airier than mine, and his Japs are refreshingly respectful. Tom Ruddock has a real clipper-shipmaster personality, and why he is now merely a lowly shell-opener is the one subject on which he does *not* touch, though, I am to learn later from men who have watched his awe-inspiring benders when ashore, that there has been some pretty steep tragedy in his past.

As we yarned, we were interrupted by a terrible yelping of men and dogs from the bank. It heralded the arrival of a donkey team with wool for a schooner due any time now at the jetty. Two dozen of the little grey beasts, in very poor condition owing to the drought, many besides being mares with foals running with them further to drain their strength, were straining and staggering through the heavy sand, belaboured over every yard by four tall black fellows and two noisy gins, whose falsetto yelps drowned even those of the half-dozen dogs and pups at their heels. A freshly killed kangaroo had been slung on top of the bales, regardless of the heat and the shoals of flies.

'The first wool ever shipped from the nor'-west left this creek close up sixty years ago,' said Tom. 'I'd like to have the price of all the wool that has been picked up since that time, even from this old jetty.'

He broke off and stared intently at my lugger. Following his gaze, I saw it had been boarded by one of the binghis, a big, bearded fellow, perhaps six feet four, though you might knock off a couple of inches for his mop of hair. He was mooching around the deck as if he owned it, and the crew and Japs were evidently at a loss how to get rid of him. The big black had not noticed our presence. He thought the

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coast was clear for him to indulge in a little Jap-baiting, ending up with a demand for baccy or tucker, which they would gladly hand over to get rid of him. So much was evident. And it was just as evident that he knew the right way to go about it, for he was lolling and spitting about the deck, grinning affably and acting the strong, if not too silent, man from way, way back. His irritating falsetto laugh could be plainly heard as he teased the cleanly Japs, to whom his spitting was evidently the last straw.

'I'll fix that one,' said Tom, and immediately he jerked out a sharp Captain-Kettle-like bark, 'Hey you! What you make there, eh?'

The big black fellow started guiltily, but controlled himself and sang out that he wanted to buy baccy.

'Got nothing baccy,' Tom rapped out, jerking his hand in the direction of the telegraph station. 'Storekeeper, he got plenty baccy. Now you go!'

The big binghi rose to his feet and spat again to save his face . . . but over the side this time. Then he strolled casually to the stern and lowered himself into the mud.

Tom, grunting wrathfully, sat down again.

'Some of these blacks can act very sulky unless you know how to treat 'em,' he said. 'Some of the squatters are rough enough themselves, and when you get a rough squatter you usually get rough blacks, scared of anyone who can handle them of course, but willing to try it on with strangers every time. When you walk on to that sort of a run looking for a job, if you can't use your mits, God help you. For the whites teach their niggers to box, and they're no dopes at the game either. If you make a mess of things, you might as well pack your swag and walk off at once, for you'll get no peace. They'll all want to have a go at you. All the same, they're darned good station hands with anyone who can handle

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them and, of course, occasionally you get a really good specimen who behaves himself a whole lot better than a lot of white men you could mention.'

Meanwhile, Tom's cook had produced a most remarkably appetizing smell.

'Stay and eat,' invited Tom. 'Turtle steaks!'

'This Kino, my diver,' he went on, 'is one of the old breed, full of fishermen's superstitions. I'll tell you what he'll do with the bones of this turtle. He's probably already given the cook orders not to spoil the skeleton more than he can help. Anyway, what bones come unshipped he'll tie in place again with a twist of wire. Then he'll get a rice cake made and set it in the beak of the skull. The whole affair will then be lowered overboard and set adrift in the shell the moment we get to sea again. The shell will go along because it's of no use. If it had been a hawksbill turtle, of course the shell would stay on board. The rice cake is by way of payment to the Sea God for the meat stolen off the bones of his sacred creature. You return the bones for him to build a new turtle round if he wants to. That dispels any grievance he may have harboured and stops him from sending a 'cockeye' to swamp you. (A cockeye is a willy-willy. One term means a big 'blow', the other means a small one, but I have heard them used indiscriminately so often that I still don't know which is which.)

Alas, by the time those appetizing turtle steaks were ready my throat had just started on another spell of rebellion. Bidding Ruddock a hasty good-bye, lest he should start advising me of remedies and so keep me waiting in that asphyxiating mangrove atmosphere, I escaped to the dunes.

When at length I returned very exhausted to the lugger, I found all hands had gone dryshelling on the reef, except the simple, cheery Matsumoto who had been left as caretaker.

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I had been warned never to get familiar with Japs. They would take advantage of it. 'Best not speak to them at all except when you just have to', had been everyone's advice. While not carrying the matter quite that far, I had early recognized that it would do Igashi no good to converse with him. Other divers would probably be similarly inclined to airs. But the poor 'buggle-up' Mitsutani and the peasant-minded Matsumoto were a different proposition. These two were as humble as only the unspoiled peasant and the broken man can be. Mitsutani with the bung lungs had already noted my constrained breathing, and had shown real sympathy in a dozen ways. Matsumoto was always genial, never officious. Silent, bland, but far from inscrutable, he always tittered when addressed, showing his broken though still white teeth. His shrill falsetto laugh would ring out on the slightest excuse. He would titter convulsively at the antics of a fish caught on his hand-line. Nevertheless, in spite of its silly, irritating tone, I knew it was a genuine laugh, the laugh of a fat, contented, unambitious coolie. But if Matsumoto had no ambitions himself, he had great hopes for his son, back in Japan, whose letters he had to get Igashi to read to him. Seated in the well, splicing a rope, Matsumoto now told me about this son of his, who was a real college boy, having won a scholarship to I just forget which university. I could not help wondering whether the educated coolie would turn out a better man than his simple father, for, from what I have seen of clerking peasantries, they appear to lose a good deal in exchange for very little gain. However, since then, I have discovered there is one Matsumoto who writes beautiful English prose, whilst another is an authority on biology, so I cannot help wondering if the old tender's offspring also lifted himself out of the ruck.

While we talked, I made a sketch of Matsumoto, much to

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his delight. He held it in his stumpy fingers with every mark of reverence, whilst he crooned with surprise and pleasure. On Igashi's return he got the diver to address an envelope to his son. Then he folded my drawing, inserted it, and set off down to the store to post it. Somehow I don't think this slight essay into familiarity did much harm. Card-playing and drinking with coloured men is what undermines authority and tempts them to pit their cunning against their white associates.

After four days in the creek, we sailed off to fish the reef outside, anchoring inside the reef at night in the calmest of water, though there might be a fair sea outside. When the tide, flowing or ebbing, reached the reef, it poured over with a loud roaring that made me think of a football crowd. A homesick man could have closed his eyes and been back in his city whilst it lasted.

I found my Swetenham Malay dictionary a great distraction now that the novelty of gazing over the side had worn a bit thin. I tried my newly-acquired phrases on the crew, chiefly on the cook when he brought my meals aft, or on the shell trimmer. Further, I kept a log in Malay, recording the number of shells taken daily, and the weather conditions. I can't read it now, but it was great fun at the time and caused shrieks of laughter when read out — though this again did not seem to lead to any undue familiarities.

Malay is a most amusing tongue, because of the truly child-like and bland methods of word-construction. Take the word 'orang', for instance, which, as everyone knows, means 'man'. Orang utan, is 'man wood' or 'old man of the woods', orang laut is 'man sea' or sea gipsy. In other combinations we find, one-man 'a person', man-man 'people', man-file 'a miser' (you can picture him filing his dollars), man-jest 'a comedian', whilst an umpire is half-man, a word which

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should delight the fans of the losing side. Every word in the dictionary affords as many ingenious and amusing combinations. Now for a sentence: 'If you start early in the morning you will arrive by daylight', is, 'If go morning-morning can all light day'; which is straight-forward enough and rivals pidgin English for simplicity.

The minds of the Koepangers function similarly. Their pidgin for 'tapioca', for instance, is 'all same small brodder rice.'

Between coughing fits I was enjoying this life very much. All the more, in fact, because I was now perfectly sure I should have to say good-bye to it very soon. They say a consumptive has compensatory fits of vivid appreciations. I think my sort of asthma must carry a similar recompense.

There was a time a few years back when lugger crews kept no Sundays, but the divers' club has changed all that. Sundays are now a 'make and mend'. Most of the mending on our lugger I noticed was done by the trusty Matsumoto. Sunday was spent by the diver and crew in playing cards, visiting or being visited by other luggers, or in washing clothes, which process is done in sea-water and with no soap. The clothes to be washed are soaked, then laid on the deck and pounded with the bare feet, grape-treader fashion; every little while a fresh bucket of sea water is dipped up and flung over them to be trodden in and out of the material. Another method of washing, when the lugger is under way, is to tie your clothes securely to a rope and tow astern.

The diver's underwear was washed each night by Mitsutani, for a man sweats a great deal down there; yet he has to wear heavy underclothes because the water beneath the surface is cold.

In their dug-out-like quarters in the poop, for'ard of the pumps, the brown men lie chattering and smoking or playing

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cards, not seriously, but with much merriment. There is one Koepanger too, a man of perhaps twenty-five, who has a delicate, womanish and rather dissipated face. His hair is always oiled, likewise his body, and on Sundays and evenings he affects a more womanish sarong than those worn by the others. He also paints his eyes and seems to have several cronies among the visiting crews, entertaining each one of them *à deux*. Sometimes I see them with arms twined round each other's necks, perched in the bowsprit stays, or lounging, huddled together by the small windlass in the cathead. I never get a definite eyeful of these antics. It is no business of mine anyway. These people have their own customs, older customs than the Nordic's conventional morality. Indeed I have long since come to the conclusion that there are only two deadly sins — the least serious of these is that of minding other people's business uninvited, and the king sin of the world is that of failing to mind other people's business when paid good money by them to do so.

And now, miserable creature that I am by reason of my jangled ganglio, it becomes increasingly evident that I am to be guilty of that very deadliest sin. Day and night, and almost without any let-up, I spend in that state of dopiness induced by partial strangulation. I can just about perform my duties by the oysters and no more. Then I must totter back gasping to prop myself against the cabin roof. I am now utterly unable to stay in the cabin at all, whether Igashi is in there smoking or not. I get my sleep by snatches, crouched in the well, except when there is enough sea on for us to be shipping water. Then I climb on to the sloping roof of the cabin and cling there in a miserable half-stupor. The Koepangers have long since given up the idea that this performance is a joke. Igashi, though he says nothing, is getting uneasy. It is an awkward thing for a Jap to have a

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dead white man on his hands. These things have to be explained, and the body has to be produced for a post mortem, which would naturally be an impossibility if, in my weak state, I rolled overboard some night when alone on deck.

So, although it was still another three weeks to lay-up, I told the diver one evening he must run me into the nearest port without delay. He would lose a day or two's fishing thereby. I was sorry for that, but I really could not stand one more day at sea than was absolutely necessary to get me ashore. Igashi seemed relieved at my decision. He said that Hedland was two days nearer than Broome and that the wind was behind us. We would go to-morrow.

But in the morning there was no wind, nor did it get up till about two in the afternoon. Then Igashi gave the word and the lugger raced south all through the rest of that day and all night, a period that was just one long delirium of strangulation for me, except for one short spell when I became aware that Mitsutani was massaging my ribs. It was during this lucid interval that I noticed a sudden commotion aft. Something big had got itself hooked on the line with the 'spinner' that was being trailed astern. Two of the crew were wrestling hard to play this monster into submission. I could see all this in a sort of dream. The moon had just risen and by its light I could distinguish something like a long, narrow ingot of gleaming silver, bounding about on the surface of the water and flogging around in our wake first to port, then to starboard, like an oscillating needle. Then I lost interest, to be aroused again by a louder hubbub than ever. The crew were now leaping like monkeys round that writhing, snapping bar of silver, belabouring it with tomahawks, knives, and billets of wood from the cook's fuel stack.

That scene of butchery is virtually my last recollection

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of my spell at sea in that lugger. I should very much like to know the name of that mysterious and beautiful monster, but I lost consciousness before they had it properly landed and, when I again regained my senses, we were in Hedland, and my one thought was to get ashore and discover when the next Perth-bound boat was due. I was going back to the Darling Hills, the one place where my breathing had become normal, and which I had been fool enough to leave. I had no energy for interest in anything but this programme.

Two days later I went aboard the *Gorgon* and so reached Perth, but not the Hills, for when I called at the hospital for treatment, they kept me there.

I received a rather indignant letter from Brand in reply to my wire advising him of my defection. In the pearling game my sudden move must have looked highly suspicious. But what else *could* I have done? I hope he's forgiven me by now.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND ROUND

IN the General Hospital, first they put me in the Old Men's ward, where the ancients go to die off and keep to schedule at the rate of at least one death a night. They were just about ripe for it when they came in. I remember one Swede opposite me. His was a case of nervous exhaustion, a vital bankrupt, waiting for his discharge. He lay propped up on a back rest, hardly ever spoke and rarely could be coaxed to eat. One dawn he slipped off his back-rest and lay breathing far too noisily, so I called the night nurse, and I got out of bed to help her lift him, for he was a large man and she was very small. When we had him set up again he made the first audible speech I had ever heard from his lips. He said quite distinctly: 'I'm sorry I'm such a trouble, nurse.' Then he started to cough and strangle, and was dead in a few minutes.

In contrast to the gentle Swede was an old Scotsman in the bed next to mine. He used to sleep lying forward on a heart-table, but when awake he was as lively as if he had just been monkey-glanded. His favourite trick he played on every nurse till they got wise to him. He would wait till a nurse had passed and had her back to him, then he would yelp out, 'Hey, lass!' Of course, the nurse would swing round with a startled expression, to find most of us looking at her grinning; but old Scottie would be gazing stolidly out at the other end of the ward or through the window opposite his bed. Scottie was threatened with all sorts of dire punish-

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ments, but they could not break him of this trick. When his old granny of a wife came and fed him bananas he looked more like a Voronoff case than ever, so I began to think his heart attacks were a sham. But they weren't. One night he passed out quite suddenly. A very old Chinaman took his place, and he also came to his death quite as a matter of course. None of these old men seemed to worry much. It was the relatives, where there were any, who did the weeping. My sojourn in that ward gave me the impression that death from old age is very much like a welcome falling asleep after a long and tiring day. But I was glad to get away from it, when my papers arrived from the pensions department in Melbourne, and I was shifted into the 'Repat', the Returned Soldiers' Ward. Here I had a very good time indeed for nearly five months, during which they took a copper bullet out of my back (that Bohain marksman had evidently picked up a French rifle) and also pruned my nasal passages and antra. All this time I had been kept breathing by adrenaline injections, at first every four hours and sometimes oftener, then at longer and longer periods till they got me down to one a day. When they discharged me at length, I was given a hypodermic syringe so that I could continue the injections myself. Thereafter I was literally granted a new lease of life, for, so long as I had my adrenaline with me, I was able to go fearlessly anywhere and indulge in any occupation or amusement. In fact the effect was so magical that I wondered why no one in the old country had put me wise to it. Then one day I read a book on asthma, written by a specialist, and therein I learnt why. The average person is still considered too stupid to be entrusted with a syringe, for he might take it on himself to try dosing other cases among his friends with it. This may be true, but having mingled with average men all my life,

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I incline to the belief that they are not quite such rabbits as professional men and newspaper editors prefer to assume.

I shall now have to be very careful in my statements and conclusions, for I have reached a juncture in my life which is so difficult to relate that I should evade that relation if the story of my subsequent development did not demand it. One assumption alone lends me heart to proceed. However wrong my conclusions may be, I am certain the statements from which they are drawn will eventually be recognized as valuable evidence in the conquest of that vastly extended field which the psychologist of the near future will inevitably explore. The reader has seen that I come of queer parentage. According to his interpretation of that fact, his reception of what I now have to say must depend. He may think me mad, or he may accompany me to Hamlet's conclusion that there are more things in heaven and earth than philosophy has yet explained. One hesitates to use the word 'heaven' nowadays, if one wishes to be taken seriously, but if we define *heaven* as a reaching out from self, and *hell* as contraction into self, part of this difficulty should disappear. It is then also easy to see why our 'simple' ancestors placed Heaven beyond the stars ('For they heard continually the voices of the angels who were singing in Paradise, which was situated at no great height above them — in fact, only about thirty spans — *according to the measure of the spirit,*' as is recorded by Ephraim, the Syrian) and Hell beneath their feet right at the core of that terrestrial self on the surface of which we move like an incandescence of conscious intelligence. The healthy ethical urge is to reach outward and upward. I suggest that the accident of my queer parentage has made me more consciously aware of this urge than would otherwise have been the case.

At the risk of appearing inclined to hypochondria, I have

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enlarged on my asthma. Paradoxically enough, I do this not so much to enlarge on my weakness as from a wish to prove that my 'medicine' has been strong. And, in saying that, I am not referring to the adrenaline. I am using the word 'medicine' in precisely the Red Indian sense. I mean my guardian genius, or, to put it another way, the power of escape into something which is not my everyday self, that power which I first recognized at school and which during my last short visit to the Darling Hills had assumed so queer a development. I have taken trouble to impress my asthmatic condition on the reader because I believe that my nervous derangement had something to do with that development. And I consider that my condition is not pathological, but rather one of exaggerated psychic awareness, a condition perhaps common enough among our ancestors, but destroyed in modern man by two main factors, the enjoyment of too much security from danger, and the preoccupation with material concerns. I believe that the human skin is one large sense organ, a receiving set capable of exciting and being excited by many influences both external and internal about which we know practically nothing as yet, but that the latest developments in endocrinology and the study of the glandular system (what Krauss calls the 'inner man', the 'personality') will reveal the fact that in addition to our five commonly accepted senses we possess at least two others. These two extra senses are those which are responsible for the development of the religious sense in man; one is the sense of Adoration which has developed from the photism of all living things, and the other is the sense of awe which is in some way cradled in the glandular system so that the god Pan, the Unseen Watcher of the Wild, may well be a dual phenomenon, experienced both objectively and subjectively. Pan and Apollo are thus words for objective realities detected

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by the senses and by the whole skin of which the sense organs are modifications. The former sensed by the skin as a vague uneasiness is translated by the glandular system into the emotion known as awe which, together with that other emotion known as Adoration, forms the bedrock of that healthy religious sense which, owing to the mechanically perfected conditions of modern civilization, is threatened with atrophy. In me, and in others no doubt who keep silence on the matter, owing to the accidents of heredity and circumstance, that sense of awe is active as a physical awareness of Something which demands that awareness in man as its right, just as there is also Something which demands Adoration.

There you have it. So apprized, the reader is now free to regard my further experiences in this line either as delusions or as imperfectly accepted impressions from some external source. All I can do is to present those experiences as faithfully as limitations will permit.

On quitting the Ward, at Garland's hospitable suggestion, I returned to his cottage near Darlington with a commission to illustrate three magazine stories. In the peace of the Hills I promised myself I would make a good job of those drawings.

On the first night, rather nervously, I repeated my former manœuvres of going out on to the veranda to see what would happen, but I was afraid to attempt my former experiment and nothing *did* happen. But returning to that valley was like renewing acquaintance with a beautiful friend, so I took my bed outside and, after a while spent in watching the stars amid the tree-tops, I fell asleep with a perfectly tranquil mind. I can't say how long I had stayed asleep either, till I became suddenly aware of that strange caressing feeling. My feet were being stroked at the soles, but internally.

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Followed a swift change of the manœuvre. It was now as if a warm tide were flowing up my legs, or as if whatever it was had started to roll up through my body with gathering impetus. In absolute panic I wrenched myself awake to hear my own voice crying, 'No! No! I don't want you!' and, at that moment (I am perfectly certain I was awake by now), I felt the mysterious tide turn and rush back down my limbs and out of me in a manner which I can only liken to that of a snake gliding swiftly out of a hole. The thing had answered my invitation with a vengeance and had chosen its own time and manner of influence. I was thoroughly frightened. In fact, for a long time I was too scared to do anything but remain in a sort of psychic attitude of defence, alert to repel the slightest indication of a renewed invasion with all the strength of will I could muster. Then, on reflection, I began to regret my cowardice, which had balked my curiosity of this chance to investigate something new. As on that former occasion, once I had regained control of myself, I redoubled my invocations. But all to no purpose. Whatever it was had utterly withdrawn. So after a while I went to sleep again and reached next morning without further adventure.

My cheated curiosity now got the better of me. It became an obsession to retrieve that lost opportunity. Every little while, both by night and day, I would resume my invocations, but always in vain. However, I did not let this interfere with my work. On the contrary, I seemed filled with an extraordinary access of energy, and I wrote and drew with unflagging ardour. After a while I abandoned my fruitless attempts at communication with the unknown, but I continued to feel a sort of intimate connection between myself and this environment.

In a shack not far away I sometimes heard a fiddle. It

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was played by a young man who worked in the Boya stone quarries. He called on me one day. I happened to be coughing at the time. He was one of those people who are immediately interested in an invalid and who will not let him be till they have worried him into trying some pet cure. This youth's panacea was Rosicrucianism. He begged me to let him write to the H.Q. of that sect on my behalf. All I had to do was to include a specimen of my handwriting and to state the date and hour and second of my birth. My new friend assured me the Brothers would then cast my horoscope and take other steps necessary to guiding me back to complete health.

Rather rebelliously, I did as he required, and in due time I received a letter from California telling me a prayer had been put up on my behalf. Literature was also enclosed, showing how I might join the society if so minded. However, the cough had not gone.

A week later, I received another letter. This was from a young woman I had met in Perth. She too, or rather her mother, had been anxious to help me, but in a more mundane fashion. They had written to a friend of theirs who managed a sheep station on the Gascoyne River, asking him if he could take me as a jackeroo. In their enthusiasm my friends had entirely forgotten to mention my cough. This man had now replied, saying I could have the job any time I liked to turn up.

My cough now was worse, if anything, than it had been a few weeks back, though that did not really worry me, for a shot of adrenaline immediately checked the worst spasm. However, naturally I did not want to become an addict to this palliative, so I decided to try what this proffered change of climate would do. Having made this decision, I wired Sherman, the manager of Hennessy Downs Station, and then

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booked a berth once more aboard the dear old *Bambra*. When I went aboard, however, I found I had for cabin mate a man who not only smoked continually, but stayed below all day and night and smoked tobacco twice as acrid as Igashi's. So, by the time we reached Carnarvon, the Gascoyne port, I was just about a cot case and as unconvincing a jackeroo as ever fouled the eye of a prospective employer. Sherman looked very sour indeed, especially when I immediately coughed up the initiatory gin sling he stood me. However, he said nothing, but drove me out over the odd hundred miles to his place, where he turned me over to Jack, the bookkeeper and truck-driver, to be broken in.

The first day Jack handed me an axe and took me out in the truck to collect dead 'jam' scrub for firewood. Jam is named from its smell, which is like raspberry conserve. It is a particularly hard wood, and the axe was not too sharp. The temperature was around 110 in the shade, and there was no real shade except that thrown by the truck. By midday I had had three spasms of coughing, and Jack was convinced I was a morphia fiend. That afternoon I had to beg to be let off. Next day Jack produced two horses, hung a coil of fence-wire over my shoulders and another over his own, then handed me an axe and himself took a crowbar and a shovel. Thus equipped, we rode eighteen miles to a broken strip of fence, mended several panels and rode back, getting in by sundown. I was still very bad, and could not eat any supper. To my surprise, however, I did not cough that night. Next morning I felt very much better but rather weak. Sherman called me aside after breakfast.

'Look here,' he said. 'I don't know much about you, but I've seen enough to know two things. You got this job under false pretences. You're useless. You're a hospital case. Secondly, you're a Pommy (an Englishman), and I don't like

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Pommies. In fact, I hate 'em. You can go back to Carnarvon next time the truck goes in. In the meantime you can do what you like so long as you keep out of my sight.'

Now, it's an extraordinary thing, but with that one night minus the cough and a good breakfast inside me I knew I was going to get better. And I felt so mad at Sherman's slating me without giving me a chance to explain, that I got normal at that very moment, and I stayed normal during the whole of the five ensuing months which I spent at Hennessy Downs. For I did not go down by the next truck.

I told Sherman I was not responsible for the way he had been misled. I told him I understood he had agreed to take me as a convalescent just out of hospital. I added I would work around the yard till the truck went in, so's he'd not be out on the tucker I ate. Thereupon I walked across to the wood-pile and split wood till the Chinese cook rang the gong for morning tea at eleven. I was just about all in by then, but I had no intention of going into the house. I wanted to see as little of Sherman as possible.

However, that gentleman had changed his mind. He appeared at the door and hollered to me to come in. I took no notice. He came across.

'Don't you want any tea?'

'Not in your company.'

He looked a bit ashamed. Then he laughed.

'You seem to have butchered a lot of wood this morning,' he said. 'D'you think you can keep it up?'

'How in hell should I know? I feel all right at present, that's all I can say.'

'All right! Well, just forget what I said this morning. If you can keep it up, you're on at a quid a week till I think you're worth more. How does that suit you?'

So I went in for my tea. And I went back to the wood-pile

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feeling like a four-year old. In a week Sherman put me on the scheduled wage for a jackeroo, which is two pounds. Then he told me to roll my swag, get what else I needed at the station store, get a saddle and bridle and hobbles from the harness shed, and come with him in his car.

'I'm taking you to an outcamp,' he said. 'I want you to help the boundary rider. He'll tell you what to do.'

The camp was twenty miles from the homestead. It consisted of a tent pitched by a well. The boundary rider was away riding his fences. Sherman dumped me and turned back. When he had gone, I took a look around the camp. It was certainly the dirtiest I had ever seen. So I thought I would put in the time profitably in washing a few utensils. First, I had to wash two old floursacks as dish rags and towels, for there appeared to be none. After that I got in some firewood.

At sundown I saw a yellow dog slide down to the trough, and a minute later a long, lean bearded man on a very thin horse also came out of the scrub and made for the trough. There seemed something familiar about this man, even at that distance. Where had I seen him before?

Having unsaddled his horse whilst it drank, he led the animal to the wire gate of a night paddock and, turning it through, slipped off the bridle and faced towards the tent. I had already recognized the walk the moment the man had moved on foot. That corn-soled shamble was unique. The face now endorsed my fears. The man was none other than Igashi's bugbear, the lousey Fred. This explained the filthiness of the camp.

I was now to get a bellyful of this Fred all to myself during the six days it took us to muster the four hundred rams in this paddock and dodge them down to the ram paddock at the homestead. In the first place, Fred hadn't changed

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his socks for several weeks. He slept in them. He also slept with the ginger slut, Dimple, coiled against him for warmth (for the nights were cool). His talk was mostly of the War and what Fred had done at the War. For instance, he had taken part in the famous battle of the Wozzur. And the feat of which he was most proud was the kicking to death of a redhat, in which exploit Fred claimed the major credit.

But whenever I turned the conversation on Broome, beyond venting a few generalized curses on the Japs, my camp mate had nothing to say. Fred was not a pleasant companion. In fact, you might say his every look and every action were symbolic curses on life in general. He was an outcast and he knew it. I was to meet others rather like him in the bush, but all accepted their role with a certain saving dignity which was lacking here, and surely none could hold a nose to Fred for dirt. He boiled a flour pudding one day in a foul strip of blanket. It came out like a woolly lamb.

‘Ain’t you eatin’ any pudding?’ he growled.

‘No,’ I said. ‘I’m not a cannibal.’

‘Wot d’yer mean by that?’

‘It seems to have been born with your earmark on.’

He didn’t speak to me again that day.

I was now perfectly fit and enjoying life to the hilt, in spite of a few trifling drawbacks such as saddle boils, festering sores in my hands from splinters (and sores *do* fester in the nor’west) and continual irritation from Fred’s society. In fact, I believe these irritations were direct accessories to my complete recovery. The air, too, was like a tonic, especially before dawn when the bush exuded its tang with a crispness that was delightful as it was evanescent, for when the sun gets up the scents grow at once cloyingly heavy.

At dawn, well over the sandhills, an observer may perhaps

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note emus like spindle-legged shadows stalking warily to the troughs to squat and sip daintily with many suspicious glances, then rise and speed away. Perhaps topping a sandhill a camel may be seen, grey and motionless, silhouetted against the skyline like some huge cardboard toy. Other and squatter figures of an almost uniform grey resolve into sheep patiently waiting for a drink in the corner of an adjoining paddock, where the water has been shut off purposely to 'trap' them.

A dark speck moving slowly across the sand proves to be a man in a khaki service overcoat. In his hand he trails two bridles and every little while he pauses, listening intently for horsebells. A stab of flame amid the shadows thrown by a thick clump of bushes marks the camp where his off-sider has just set a billy on to boil. The man by the fire warms his hands at the blaze.

Half an hour later the men may be seen discarding their overcoats, for the dawn chill has now given place to the morning heat. Unhanging their already saddled horses from a bush near their already dead fire, they make for a sheep yard, built of thorny scrub, and, tearing a gap, they release some three hundred sheep, heading them towards the troughs. Two hundred-odd waiting sheep are picked up and watered with this mob, the troughs being again emptied and the ball-cocks blocked to trap more in the same way. Thus, a paddock where there is no milkweed or other herb that acts as a substitute for water, may be combed clear in a few days without the bother of riding. But we may assume the combing completed in this case, as the men will make sure that the water is flowing freely when they leave, so that stragglers shall not perish of thirst.

The mob now moves down the fence, guided by the men and their dogs, whilst a host of rose and grey galah cockatoos

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and of crowned and bronze-winged pigeons mobs the now deserted troughs. Another hour, and the men, still moving their charges slowly down the fence over interminable sandhills, hear faint shouts and catcalls that grow louder and more frequent as they advance. Two more hours elapse, however, before they reach the rendezvous to which these other yelpers are headed, for the mob has to be kept at the pace of its weakest members. Topping one more sandhill, at length they sight long strings of sheep trailing in from all directions towards a mob some thousands strong already bunched about the well. The air is dense with dust and there is a continuous and deafening blather. Watering here has to be done cautiously, or the leaders will get crowded into the trough and perhaps drowned by the push of the thousands behind them. To prevent this, men must stand at the trough and poke the rear ranks back from those already drinking.

When the whole mob has been watered and the men have eaten their 'crib' (lunch sandwiches) the whole assembly moves off towards the shearing sheds (perhaps another two days' journey) or whatever may be their destination, disappearing over the sandhills in a cloud of dust like a small sandstorm. The deserted mill at the rendezvous clanks and churns in the wind if there is any. Here also birds crowd to drink. The peace of the bush settles once more on the place. From behind a sandhill rises a column of smoke. This means that some cancerous ewe or other weakling has fallen out and a man has dismounted to cut its throat, throw the body into a thicket of dry wood and set a match to it to rob the blowflies of a likely nursery for their eggs. Soon there is a trail of smoke columns, marking the route taken by the mob, for there are sure to be more than one weakling, and funeral pyres are easily provided in that dry scrub.

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The above may be taken as typical of mustering manœuvres. Of course, Fred and I, having rams in our charge, were too select to travel with the others. We took our own route parallel with their fires which we saw in the distance. I asked Fred if they weren't afraid of starting bush fires. He said no. Bush fires were just what they wanted, now the paddocks were temporarily empty. The fences were protected by cleared tracks running each side of them. Whatever else went up in smoke was all to the good, for it would come up all the greener and sweeter.

On our way in with the rams Fred worked Dimple so well that my respect for man and dog rose considerably. He used three commands. 'Get to the lead!', 'Set 'em back!' and 'Behind!', and Dimple almost always obeyed promptly and efficiently. When she jibbed, Fred roared curses and flung dead sticks at her. Some men, as I was to discover later, never have to do this with their dogs. But, although Fred's methods of training had been faulty, Dimple was quite as much use as another man and horse would have been, thus eliminating expense for the station. When the slut went lame, Fred would get off his horse and search for burs and thorns between her toes. At night he rubbed her feet with mutton fat. When she was dry, he would pour water for her from his canvas water bag into a dent in the top of his hat.

'Got to give dogs lots of water,' he explained, 'or they're liable to quit on you and go off to look for it. But if you give them too much they get lazy. Needs judgment.'

When sent to the lead to hold the leaders from rushing too far ahead, Dimple would get round them like a yellow streak, bunching them up against the fence. Then she would pick a bush, dig herself down to cooler sand in the shade of it, and lie there panting and cooling off till we caught up.

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As we travelled, Fred did not neglect his ordinary duties as a boundary rider, noting the condition of the feed on the way in, fishing dead birds and bats out of the tanks at the wells, cleaning out the troughs — for sheep refuse foul water — and picking an emu out of a fence where it had got itself tangled. He also sent me up a tree to destroy an eagle-hawk's nest, in which I found one fledgling. In the tree were certain objects which looked like small wasp nests. I brought away one of these and tore it open, whereupon I started to sneeze violently, for inside were caterpillars which give off a powder like snuff. It is strong enough to burn one's skin in tender places. Luckily, I got none in my eyes. Luckier still, even this did not bring back my cough. Characteristically Fred did not warn me. That is a trait of the nor'-west character. Let the greenhorn learn by experience. Of course occasionally one meets a nor'-wester who departs from this rule. Then life becomes much easier.

My Canadian training was not so much use as I had imagined. Conditions here were naturally different, but what was even more confusing was that ideas were different. For instance, wherever I had been in Canada one hobbled a horse above the fetlocks to save the pasterns from ricking. Here, horses are hobbled below their fetlocks to save their sinews, and of course any departure from this practice meets with parochial scorn.

The shearers had arrived during my week's jaunt with Fred. I now had a medley of jobs, sometimes in the yards as a rouseabout, sometimes mustering the small paddocks round the homestead, into which the musterers turned their sheep to wait their turn at the sheds, and sometimes again taking shorn sheep out to empty paddocks. Whatever I did was sure to entail a lot of hollering in clouds of choking dust. Yet not once did I cough. I drank water of all

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denominations, from rain-water from the house tanks to well-water so saline as to be considered fit only for stock, and I drank buckets of it too, yet I sweated so continually and copiously that it did me no harm. My favourite beverage was a mixture of Eno's salts and ships' limejuice, both of which could be bought at the store.

My cure seemed like a miracle. In fact, one afternoon, when riding behind a mob of shorn sheep after a particularly choking morning in the yards, the thought suddenly came to me that it might truly be a miracle. For, strange to say, I had forgotten all about those friendly Rosicrucians. What if my friends in Perth had been moved to write to Sherman by some queer pressure of massed telepathy directed from the H.Q. of that society and centring round myself to involve all connected with me! Or again, had that queer visitor of mine whom I had repulsed in such terror taken this means of returning good for evil? Or again, had the preliminary move been pure blind luck and my subsequent rapid recovery been due to will power and a savage desire to show Sherman I had not come to him under false pretences after all? I could not answer these questions. But I found these speculations intriguing companions on many a ride. It was also amusing to imagine what Sherman or the musterers would have made of my thoughts had they been aware of them. There was no shutting one's eyes to the fact that I was a different animal from these others. In Canada this had not been apparent, nor during the War. But something had happened to me during these long years of convalescence. I sometimes thought wounds and ill-health and loneliness had worked a crack in my crust, through which strange things inaccessible to normally constituted people were now free to seep. Perhaps that word 'cracked' had a profound inner meaning, as have some other

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colloquialisms that were invented when men had time to think out the *mot juste* for things modern man takes as a matter of course, thereby fostering his incipient psychic blindness.

An amusing instance of my detachment from the usual preoccupations of my companions will be found in the fact that, on that day of days, when the results of the Melbourne Cup were impatiently expected by all hands and the Chinese cook, I disgraced myself irretrievably. My downfall occurred when I had some reason to go down to the men's quarters a few seconds after the book-keeper had received that so important and eagerly awaited result over the 'phone.

Down at the quarters I found an expectant hush. The men hung eagerly about me as I delivered my message. Then, when I turned to go, the old windmill man (that is, the windmill repairer) who had driven into H.Q. specially for the occasion, piped out:

'Hey, Mister Jackeroo! You don't happen to know if the results are through yet? We heard the 'phone going just now and we thought you might . . .'

Unthinkingly I cut him short with, 'Yes, Jack got 'em just before I left the house.' Then immediately I experienced a sinking feeling, for I knew what would inevitably be his next question and I might as well own up right away as prolong the agony.

'I don't know the results,' I said. 'I didn't wait to listen properly.'

Blushing with shame amid a silence that could be felt, I again turned back to the house, but Fate was not to let me away without dealing the *coup de grâce*. For another old boy who had also come a long way especially for this information rode up at that moment and called out, 'Anyone heard the results yet?'

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Whereupon the windmill man lowered his paper, peered gravely over his spectacles, nodded towards me and replied quietly, 'He has. They's just got 'em up at the house.' Then he paused just long enough to lend his words sufficient point before adding, 'But it ain't no use your askin' 'im. He didn't manage to git 'em into his head.'

Sherman's wife now appeared upon the scene. She had managed to dodge shearing by going away visiting. The first thing she did was to badger the yardman into quitting. He flared up one day and left on board a passing truck. Sherman asked me would I pull on the job till another yardman could be got. So now I started each day by running in the horses for the men quartered at the station. Then I fed and milked the cows. There was no need to run them in. They were always hanging round the yard gate waiting for their feed. Keeping the house supplied with wood took a fair time. Then the goats had to be milked and the chickens fed. Troughs had to be cleaned around the house. Killer sheep to be run in and penned and butchered. Altogether, I seemed to be working harder now than during shearing even. The one bright spot was the fact that Sherman had given me charge of a blood stallion, with instructions to exercise him every day and to let no one else ride him. This horse was eighteen years old, but a delightful ride, and a picture to see.

Sherman was pretty particular as to who rode his best horses, so I appreciated the compliment. All the same, I was getting fed up, for he made no allowances for the fact that this yard job was terribly tiring, even expecting me to sit up at nights and make a fourth at bridge with himself, his wife and the book-keeper. The fact that I got up nearly two hours before they did was not appreciated by anyone but myself. Mrs. Sherman was bridge mad. She also expected

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little courtesies which would be natural enough from a jackeroo but were out of place entirely from a yardman dog-tired from trudging about through knee-deep sand most of the day, usually with something heavy in his hands or on his shoulders.

Twice I asked Sherman would he hurry up and get a new yardman. He did nothing. As a matter of fact, he was sick of hiring new men for his wife to drive away and, finding me fairly complacent, was determined to let me fill the breach as long as I would stand for it. I didn't tumble to this at first.

The last straw tipped my scale one evening when Mrs. Sherman tripped down to watch me feed the chickens.

'It's time these chooks had a better run,' she announced. 'There's lots of spare netting lying round here. D'you think you could fix up a new place for them?'

To which I answered. 'Yes, I could, Mrs. Sherman, but I really haven't the time. You get another yardman and I'll find time quick enough. But not before.'

She went off in a high dudgeon. Down came Sherman to me where I was now feeding the stallion. He seemed in a great rage and said I'd insulted his wife. I told him the facts of the case, but that didn't satisfy him.

'You can go down by the first truck,' he said. 'You can take this as my official notice.'

A week later, Jack went into town without me. When I learnt of this, I hunted Sherman up and said, 'I thought I was to go down by the first truck.'

'Ah, forget that,' he said. 'I'm satisfied, if you are.'

But I wasn't. Now I'd got back my strength I wanted to get among cattle. There was nothing particularly attractive about these sheepmen or their sheep.

I told him all these things and left by the next truck.

CHAPTER XVIII

A N O . H E N R Y S I T U A T I O N

IN town I put up at the Carnarvon Hostel. The proprietor had collected nearly every war-medal the Allied armies had to offer. He had also recently enjoyed the unenviable experience of seeing all his companions taken one at a time by sharks while he swam five miles to the shore from a wrecked lugger. At this excellent house I heard much talk of the Wiluna goldmines and a new process which was expected to put them once more on a paying footing. Wiluna was consequently attracting prospectors. Things were humming, rumour said. When I also learnt that Wiluna was in the cattle country, I decided to wait no longer, and was lucky enough to get a lift as far as Mullewa in return for my services as 'gate-opener'. Gate-opening is quite an institution in the Westralian outback. It saves the driver of a car a lot of trouble to have an offsider ready to hop out and open paddock gates when passing through fenced country, gates usually being encountered between every four to ten miles. There is an amusing story, told of a man I was to meet later. He is a cattle-buyer, so he does a lot of travelling. He is also notoriously absent-minded when at the wheel. Once, when taking his recently wedded wife for a trip through the outback, he impressed her into this service and — no doubt you have already guessed the horrible sequel — he stepped on the juice while she was closing a gate behind the car and did not remember her again till he was half-way to the next gate.

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In some places 'cattle-pits' have been installed. There are duckboards of triangular planks so constructed that cars can cross but stock can't. Nevertheless, there are still enough wire gates to make it easy for a man to get a lift.

At Mullewa I took a third-class ticket to Meekatharra, which would get me to the end of the rail and would leave only another hundred miles to cover. The carriage filled up. At the last moment an old boy hopped in and hid in the lavatory, but the conductor was wise to this game and forked him out. All the rest of us religiously showed tickets, but I was surprised to find that this was a mere bluff on the part of certain of my fellow travellers. Those of two rather hungry-looking lads entitled them to travel no further than the next station, yet they did not get out there. The conductor would not bother us again, they stated, till we reached Cue, and if he did, they intended to crowd into the lavatory, for, not having seen anyone board the train in this particular carriage he would not suspect. They were correct in their surmise. We were left undisturbed. At Cue they disappeared and remained lost all night while we crawled through the starlit mulga. At dawn we reached Meeka', and a haggard dawn it was too. I wondered if they had managed to find a warm doss at Cue, for I had found the journey perishing cold.

Meeka' seemed like a dump of old iron decorated with a few telegraph poles. No one was about yet. I dumped my swag and suitcase in the tin garage of an hotel, and set to walking the streets to keep warm. When a man lobs into some places, he gets a pleasant feeling that something is going to happen. Romantic local topography induces this state of mind in me. Other places, and this was one, have precisely the opposite effect. At first sight they seem so flat, monotonous, and dreary, that the newcomer feels

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nothing could ever have happened there and nothing ever will. Landing up in such a spot is like being dumped over the edge of the world. At railhead this effect is enhanced, for there is the added feeling that you are leaving all beaten highways behind and stepping off into a desert entirely unprotected from the naked wrath of the elements. Worse still, if the district happens to be one formerly inhabited but now abandoned to savage emptiness of time and space! Humanity has gained a foothold and dropped away again, leaving only such dreary evidences of its occupation as the geometrical scars where buildings once stood, the pocks and pimples of shafts and dumps, the lonely gallows-like silhouettes of poppet-heads and a dreary litter of rusting scrap-iron and broken bottles.

Of course, my first impression of the mulga was entirely superficial. Meeka' has a history crammed with roaring detail, neither is the surrounding country inhospitable once you get to know it, being inhabited by flocks and herds enough to feed an army, besides being rich in guannas, bardies (edible grubs) and other starving man's tucker. However, I had not quite got down to sampling this latter provender yet, for, although I had been hitting the high spots in Carnarvon, I still had five pounds in my pocket.

So meditating, as I stepped along at a blood-rousing pace, I came to a baker's, and, remembering the tramps of my own dough-punching days, promised myself a rest in the warm bakehouse. My surprise may be imagined when I found my two friends of the train journey already in occupation.

'You must have had a cold night,' I said. 'Did you ride the rods?'

They seemed shocked at the suggestion. 'We came here in our car,' the longest lad explained. 'At least it was our

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car while we had a use for it. Did you notice a truck with a new car on it covered with a tarpaulin. We got under that tarp at Cue, and it was a cold ride just as you noticed.'

Whereupon I suggested they should breakfast with me at an hotel. That was a fatal move. They had four shillings between them, and I had five pounds, as I have said. One was an English boy and the other came from Glasgow. They were unskilled labourers, and remarkably unskilled labourers too, to judge from the softness of their palms. But I couldn't see them stranded, for work was not nearly so plentiful as I had been led to believe, and living was dear. By the end of two weeks I was broke flat; and there were a good many out-of-works in that town just then, so we found charity had developed a chill. With short rations, moreover, my cough had again reared its head.

Then one afternoon, watching a football match, as we had nothing better to do, we saw two very wild-looking men in a very wild-looking car also watching the match. The whole outfit was caked in red dust and the men, who were rather drunk, had not yet troubled to clean up. Yet they did not look dirty from preference. They were lounging in their car watching the players and shouting ribald encouragements.

I liked their faces. They suggested cattle. So, summoning my courage, which had a trick of sinking with the condition of my pocket, I went over and asked them for work.

The man at the wheel gave me a quizzing look. Then he said:

'Can you ride?'

I told him I had worked with cattle in Canada.

'All right,' he said. 'We'll be back to-morrow. Keep an eye open for us!'

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And with that he stepped on the starter and charged off the field taking the gatepost with him.

'That's Mad Morgan,' said one of the crowd.

'Who's that with him?' I asked.

'That's Dave Serle, his overseer. They'll be painting the town to-night.'

But the wild men were gone, nor did they turn up next day. Making inquiries, I found they were from Wiluna, but had left town headed in the Cue direction. This seemed more hopeful. No doubt they'd pass through Meeka' on their way back.

All the second morning, however, passed without a sign of them. I was getting very hungry by now and the cough had consolidated its position during the night. Luckily I still had half a bottle of adrenaline.

About sunset, I was watching a milk cow which had walked in a business-like manner to the horse trough in the street and had calmly hooked on the tap with her horn. After drinking, this sagacious animal walked away again, leaving me to turn the tap off. Whereupon I was just wondering whether I might follow the lady to some quiet corner and get a drink of milk in my hat, when a much-battered car limped into town to stop at a repair shop. In it were my two cattlemen, rather tired, but still quite merry. They had been to Cue to inspect some cattle and had bumped into a few things on the way.

I resummoned my courage and followed Morgan into a pub. He looked at me foggily. Then his memory cleared.

'Be going out to-morrow,' he said. 'Keep an eye open for us.'

'If it's not asking too much,' I blurted out, 'how about buying me a meal? You see I didn't count on waiting so long.' I hated having to make this unfortunate request.

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He might think I was an incurable dead-beat, especially as my two Pommy satellites were hanging about the door ready to share any hand-out I might secure.

However, Morgan was a shrewd madman. He had things sized up pretty well. Turning to the proprietor of the hotel he asked him to fix me up till further orders. That disposed of my satellites. There was still twenty minutes to go till supper time. During that short while he must have poured half a dozen whiskies into me. He would take no refusal, and all the time he was harping on the riding question, bragging about one or two particularly mean horses he had that would test any man's abilities. Now, naturally, with six drinks on a very empty stomach I was already as drunk as an owl. I thought Morgan was talking at me. I was wrong. He had been on this theme when I had interrupted him, and for a very good reason. There was to be a sports day in a week or so and the pub proprietor had asked him if he had anything useful for the bucking competition. I had just been included in the conversation, and when he made a further assertion that he only employed men who could really ride, the statement had no personal application to me whatever. But naturally I thought it had.

So I too got bragging and I told Serle, quite gratuitously, I'd sit on anything he liked to give me. Which was about the most unconvincing statement I could possibly have made, for it branded me as a new chum right away. And Serle noted this. He was not quite so drunk as Morgan, who was now concocting 'black satin', which is a mixture of stout and champagne. Not content with jugs either, he had borrowed a bucket for this operation.

When we eventually reached Wiluna two days later, Tom Morgan was sober, and he stayed on the wagon for six months, in spite of the fact that the town with its three

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pubs was right in the middle of his run and used by him as H.Q., for he had no station homestead as yet.

From the moment when we sighted that little township with its whitewashed buildings I liked the look of it. Here was a place where things must inevitably happen. The country had a suggestion of Arizona, as I imagined that State to be, and the white houses had a Mexican look. Indeed, some were built of mud bricks. There was an air of romance about the place and about its name too, which I thought had a Red Indian sound. Nor were my impressions false. I met more interesting characters during the two years I spent there than I have encountered elsewhere in my life. Some day I am going to write a *Wiluna Nights' Entertainments*, and it will consist of yarns and anecdotes as I had them from the bearded lips of Wiluna's prospectors, and, if I do those yarns justice, they should rival any similar collection.

This was the 'Mulga' country of acacia scrub. It differed in some respects from the 'jam' country I had just left, but there was a strong family likeness, and large tracts of sand and the bushy spinifex grass were common to both. What impressed me most about the mulga was its similarity to the plains of western America, and indeed a sheepman from Nevada who camped with us one night received the same impression. He said there seemed to him only one thing lacking to clinch the resemblance, but that one omission made him feel very unhappy indeed. Since he had left America he had not tasted a good cup of coffee.

Here are the same abrupt stony outcrops from the general flatness. The blowholes and buttes are here, as are the snaky creeks with their deeper verdure wriggling through vast hawk and eagle haunted stretches of stunted and dusty grey scrub. Here are crabholes, salt pans, alkali lakes,

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shaley flats, and crumbling cave-honeycombed badlands, and, sheltering from the roasting midday sun in these miniature caverns, one comes on families of kangaroos, which bound away at one's approach, reviving memories of fleeing antelopes and jack-rabbits. Even the horned toad is here. And, of course, there are dust-devils racing across the landscape in fierce, unholy glee, like demon rings-o'-roses, in whose madly spinning whorls the imagination is easily tricked into perceiving wraithy Dervish forms snatched out of the brick-dust soil by some demented energy.

Anthropomorphic beliefs are dying among civilized men. It is the cities that have killed them quite as much as the creeds of the scientists. But in scenery such as this it is hard to dismiss the suggestion of some primeval workshop where anything might have been evolved if only the Creator had not grown tired of thorns and horns and such like unpromising material and so moved his experiments to more congenial climes.

Lilibalili, Morgan's station, was one of a million acres. It had been taken up twenty-six years ago but, beyond the mud-brick butcher's shop in town and a tin, earth-floored shack out at the slaughter yards six miles from town, it had not a building on it that was station property. This was outdoor life to the *n*-th, for the outcamps were mere brush shelters. The station hands did not even use tents. They slept wherever they happened to be, and in rainy weather they rigged up shelters with canvas pack covers.

But all this was to be changed in the course of the next two years. For Morgan had just taken over the place for a company with plenty of capital, and he had a free hand to effect improvements. At present he was conducting a 'bang-tail' muster, as a preliminary step to weeding out the cattle and making arrangements to carry sheep.

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A 'bang-tail' muster means one in which you count the stock on a run by the simple process of cutting the flywhisks off their tails. When all your stock are running around with banged tails the count is complete. When a station is taken over *in toto* by new owners, the brand and earmarks go with it, so there is no need for cross-branding. The process therefore simplifies itself into mustering, droving to yards, holding the cattle at nights the same as when on the road, and putting them through the crush for the tail-banging operation. The mobs are then put on whatever range has been selected for them, being held at nights on the road as before. Another stretch of the run is then mustered, and so on till the count is complete. This run was said to carry about seventeen hundred head of cattle and two hundred horses. There were five wells supplied with mills, and half a dozen other wells with whips and windlasses. The two-mile square horse-paddock, a killer paddock at the slaughter yards, and a similar arrangement at one of the outcamps, comprised all the fencing yet accomplished. Besides this, there were two good sets of timber yards thirty-five miles apart, and numerous brush yards; and that was the whole tally of improvements. But Morgan already had fencers and well-sinkers at work, and the boundary was being surveyed. There were also a horsebreaker, a windmill man, and a dog-catcher, for the dingoes were bad. The main outcamp was known as the Vatican, because it had once been occupied by an old stockman named Pope. He was still working on the run and was a 'character'.

I gathered this information as we drove out to the Vatican, getting there at one in the morning and sleeping beside the car. Night and day made no difference to Morgan. He was indefatigable. He just drove till he had to sleep and then slept. He visited all his camps continually. Sometimes he

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even nodded at the wheel, but woke instantly if the car went off the track. He was always making new tracks too, by the simple process of driving across country. This meant many punctures, but he carried two spare wheels. At times, again, he got held up by some network of creek beds and had to dodge about for miles before he got clear, but he never lost his sense of direction. Everywhere a man could take a car he went by wheel. So did the dog-catcher in his ramshackle Ford. But *he* had no spare wheels, and in rough country had sometimes to stuff his tyre-covers with spinifex or blankets in order to crawl to some camp for supplies.

Dave Serle had not forgotten my tall words. He was getting a mustering plant together at the Vatican, and he had quite a bunch of likely horses in the paddock. Some of these the horsebreaker had already handled, and among them was a stout roan colt he had named Captain.

On the second morning after our arrival at the camp, Serle had Tommy, the black horsetailer, run these horses into the yards. I was feeling particularly groggy that morning. The well water had upset me. Also I had had to indulge in three needles during the night, which I had further found very cold, as my swag was rather light on blankets. In fact, I felt half dead, for my spell of light rations in Meeka' had been a bad preparation for this sort of thing.

Serle chose just this morning to call my bluff. After breakfast everyone repaired to the yards. I knew what was coming and I felt both nervous and sulky. After considerable trouble, Dave got the roan colt shut off from the others in a small saddling yard provided with a snubbing post. The colt circled this yard at a jaunty trot with his tail flagged high: then he turned and faced us, snorting with disgust. It took Serle a ticklish ten minutes to get him haltered. At the sight of the saddle-blanket he threw a fit,

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and, at the touch of it, he crouched down quivering all over till he looked like a dog stretching, and his belly almost touched the powdered manure of the yard. By the time it came to the saddle he was ready for fight, and he succeeded in bucking it off half a dozen times before Dave got the girth buckled. Then the overseer turned him loose and he went round the yard bucking like a demon and lashing out with both hind feet in his efforts to unship that saddle. The colt seemed as if he would never tire. When at last he had had enough of this and had returned to his pawing and snorting, Dave invited volunteers to ride him. Of course, I knew the challenge was meant for me, yet I kept silence. I had never funked anything in my life before when I knew it just had to be done. But this time I absolutely could not face the occasion. It was the way that colt had lashed at the rails that had me scared. I knew I had no more bounce in me that morning than a punctured ball, and if it came to dodging those heels, I just couldn't do it.

'Come on, one of you riders,' Dave taunted, still carefully refraining from looking my way. My ears would have burned off if there had been much life left in me. Then Dick Pearce, the quarter-caste horsebreaker, having generously allowed me this opportunity to no purpose, hopped off the rail and reckoned he'd have a go. Captain had been ridden before, but only by the black fellow, Tommy, and then once only. He had given Tommy the time of his life on that occasion. Strictly speaking Captain was not a colt at all. He was a five-year-old, but that only made him the more formidable. This was why they had picked him for this little demonstration. They wanted me to get the full strength of the situation and of the station horseflesh in one go. I had only myself to blame.

Dick led the colt into a larger yard and, declining any

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help in mounting, although the colt was hopping like a cat, eventually landed in the saddle . . . and stayed there, for Captain just gave two tremendous bounds and then quit bucking for the morning. He had shaken all his energy out on that empty saddle.

I felt very sick. If only I had had the nerve . . . but, of course, I could never have mounted. It was just getting into the saddle that mattered most. Dave now told me to take a horse and go with Dick to run in a killer. But they were such a suspicious bunch and I was so dopey from my night's coughing that I could not even catch one without Dave's help. However, the grey mare he singled out for me was quiet enough once she had the saddle on, for which I was devoutly thankful. After we had run in and butchered a steer, Morgan drove up and had a chat with Dave. I could see he was disappointed with me, but he said nothing. Next day, however, I was sent out to relieve the boy who was watering cattle at a remote well. I took this as a sign that I had forfeited my spurs. The boy was considered likely to be of more use on the mustering plant than myself. And I was right, for Dave told me later no one liked hauling water. It was regarded as an Afghan job, not a white man occupation, and he was very glad of this opportunity to relieve the boy at the well, who was getting fed up. My display of caution — or shall we say rank cowardice? — and the fact that they had spotted me using my needle had convinced them I was a dope fiend. Far from being sorry they had brought me out here, they were rather curious to see how I would make out if given a chance. They (that is, Morgan and Dave) knew O. Henry's works and recognized one of his situations here — the wreck reformed by range-life. The prospect of watching how it would work out in real life tickled them hugely. Morgan, moreover, though much

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younger than myself, had been in France at the tail end of the War. He had a soft spot for returned men. So, in spite of appearance, I had fallen on my feet again. But I didn't know this at the time, and left the camp with my tail well between my legs.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WELL IN THE WILDERNESS

My furniture consisted of a tucker-box, two kerosene tins, a camp oven, a quart pot, a frying pan, and an axe with a broken haft. I had one wall which I shifted to meet the vagaries of the wind. It was a sheet of corrugated iron and on it someone had chalked a message, 'Return in $\frac{1}{2}$ our gon after eegels.' My roof was the sky. Evidently that was where the writer of the message had gone.

The boy I relieved took my horse back. Tommy, the black, who had guided me out, picked up some more or less broken horses before they went and, fancying a change of mount, eventually caught and saddled one. He did this all with patience and a spare bridle, there being no yards here, and it took him about ten minutes. Immediately he hit the saddle the horse left the ground and put up a very good exhibition for about sixty seconds. A fresh horse can crowd quite a lot of action into one minute on a cold morning. But Tommy sat there laughing. The moment the bucking show was over he set spurs to his mount and hared off after the other horses, which had naturally cleared out. As I stood there shivering in the fresh breeze, I felt decidedly glad I hadn't been put straight on a riding job, for now I realized that Morgan had not been bragging unduly about his men and his horses, and all the ground I had noticed so far seemed unconscionably hard and stony.

I learnt a lot about cattle at that well. There were about two hundred and seventy watering there, and each had an

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individuality of its own. The mob had its Lotharios, Falstaffs, Slenders, clowns and gladiators, and right valiant scraps the latter put up too. You learn more about cattle from the ground than from a saddle. They don't stop to be observed when mounted men are about, and when you have them quieted down and trooping sedately before you, they're still constrained. At a well, they forget you and behave naturally. The same applies to sheep. But cattle are far more interesting than sheep, though these too have their characters. There is more herd communism about cattle. Sheep flee at signals from their sentinels, but cattle also congregate at a call. They 'corroborree', as the stockmen say, and it is a very weird sight. My beasts would stand or lie around and chew the cud after drinking. They would also chew the dry and scattered bones of their forebears lying around the well. The lack of lime and phosphorus in the soil makes them perform this act of unconscious cannibalism. But the smell of blood agitates them strangely. Steers had been slaughtered at this camp from time to time, and beneath the tree which had been used as gallows the soil must have retained the smell of blood, for here they would gather to corroborree. Often some restless beast wandering idly around would drift on to this spot and sniff the ground in an intent manner as if trying to recall something. Then suddenly it would raise its head and emit that low troubled call, again and again. The effect on the others never varied. One after another they would drift up, snuffling with up-curved nostrils and echoing the lament. Even those comfortably couched would rise and stretch with tails curled over their backs, and then saunter easily across. Suddenly one of the beasts would start to frisk and prod its neighbour. Others would catch the excitement, and soon a sketchy sort of mêlée, accompanied by much bellowing and lowing would

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be in progress around and upon that mysterious spot. After a while they would tire and drift away, some crashing off through the bush at a gallop, others sauntering phlegmatically back to the bare and trampled flat around the well to lie down again. This is what the stockmen call corroborreeing, and it happened almost every day at that well. I have never read any description of this habit. Nor have I ever come across any really sympathetic writer on cattle except the Australian, Frank Dalby Davison, whose book *Manshy* is a prose poem and a record of wonderfully accurate and sympathetic observation. But even he has missed this matter.

Of man's four chief allies in his struggle out of savagery, the horse and the dog receive due acknowledgment. The ox and sheep, among us moderns at any rate, do not fare so well. Yet it is no light service to give one's life blood through millenniums for the cause of progress. Some men, too, think the ox looks better hauling a wagon than dismembered on a butcher's slab. Whatever the point of view, mankind owes an incalculable debt to the principle that walks the earth in bullock hides. A childish, savage, and unimportant subject! Not one to dwell on! No, nor one to forget quite! After all it was an ox-stall, not a livery barn or a garage, that witnessed a certain event in Bethlehem which exercised men's minds for nearly two thousand years, until the dawn of that Age of Reason which had given us our tittering civilization.

But that corroborreeing sets others ideas afloat in the mind; for here is surely the very first communal Awe ritual. We know that baboons in their kloof caves and the langur monkeys in their jungle treetops feel an instinct to Adoration which finds expression in them each sunrise, both in song and in gesture, for they even raise their hands, palms

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upwards, to the warmth of the rising sun. And this trait did not escape the ancient Egyptians, whose symbol for 'wisdom' is composed of a baboon with raised hands adoring Ra Khepera as he lifts above the eastern mountains. But this Awe ritual of the cattle seems to have escaped the notice of everyone save the stockmen. Yet seemingly, here, we have the first Earth mysteries as surely as among the primates we find the dim seeds of conscious Sun-worship. The Earth drinks blood: and Awe thereafter emanates from the sacrificial grove.

During the two months I stayed at my well I had plenty of time on my hands. I used up several writing pads, making sketches of cattle in a hundred attitudes. I wrote various screeds which appeared in due course in the Perth papers. And I sent down for a set of Carlyle's works, which I should certainly never have read under livelier circumstances, yet I still had plenty of time. The cough remained fairly quiescent also, but I was never again to become quite so fit as I had been at Hennessy Downs.

One evening, after Morgan had visited me in his brumby of a car, bringing me fresh steak and other stores, I lazily made up a good fire, feeling such contentment as only the till recently meat-hungry can know after a gorge of juicy beef. Then, sweeping the burs from my chosen couch with a switch broken from a bush, I spread my blankets and lay luxuriously down.

Gradually my laziness gave place to a strange excitement, due perhaps to the moon, which was at the full, lending the bush a charm unrecognizable by day; or again perhaps its real cause was nothing more exotic than the action of the beef juices on my vegetative system. Anyway, if so, it was meat that had sprung from this soil under this same moon, which I now lay facing, surrendering myself to her beauty,

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the silence broken only by the spasmodic purring flurries of the flames, the frog chorus at the well and the occasional rumbling, throaty challenge of some distant bull, or the shrill and rare complaint of some nighthawk. And all the time my fancy painted the bush as sprawling around me like some huge, informal watchdog on a holiday, alert only for play.

Now, there were two bower birds who used to visit my camp. They were very shy at first, and, though later they got quite friendly, I had never been able to find their bower. For some reason I now thought of them, wondering where their playground could possibly be hid. Then my thoughts slid back on a moonbeam to a consideration of the aching beauty of the night. If only its gemlike radiance could be personified in human form, visible and tangible, warmly yielding to my crudely clutching senses! And so, hey presto! by way of this fond imagining, the long-closed gate swung open and I found myself, as on that first evening at Darlington, going out into that marvellous, glowing night to become part of its cool, white fire. Now my feet were conscious of that soft caress. It did not seem loathsome now. Far from making any efforts to resist it my soles seemed to suck it into me till all my body was purring with such pleasure as I had never known before. It was just as if my wish had been granted. True, the night had not come to me as the painters picture the moon coming to Endymion, yet something just as wonderful had happened. By some means this 'too, solid flesh' had indeed melted, permitting something in me to go out to, meet, merge with and bring back, some calm and peaceful, though at the same time vastly stimulating, essence from without. Yet, if this were a sort of ecstasy, it was one of an entirely earthy and pagan nature. I heard no angelic choirs, experienced no ineffable brilliance. The

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world remained moonlit and I was one with its calm light, though, within me, all manner of exciting things were happening, for I had only to peer around with a sort of inward eye to recognize local topography with which I was already acquainted and, beyond the known, to be aware of vast vistas that I did not know. Here was the well with its windlass and its rough surrounding rails. Here was the patch of dead gums from which I hauled my firewood, here was the corroborree ground of the cattle about that ominous, grey-boled and utterly ghostly dead tree which had been used as a gallows, and it seemed that here the blood-soaked ground was now faintly phosphorescent; and here again was that stony hill behind it, lightly sprinkled with spindly bushes, where I had reason to believe my bower birds had their playground. Struck by this reflection, I peered closer. Now, if ever, surely, I would find that bower. And sweeping that silent moonlit hill within myself with a hovering eye, seemingly hung in the moon, herself, I did actually find that bower and, not far from it, a nest in which, warmly huddled beneath their mother, were, I think, six fluffy babies. You must not expect an exact report of details, for there was a dreamlike quality about this vision which has left me with a recollection blurred as regards nicer points. Thus, though I searched my mind next day, I could not remember any landmarks, beyond the general one of the hill, by which I might locate that nest. Nor were the birds just birds. As I could see into myself, so I could see into them, and what I found there was something akin to myself, something indescribable, not of myself alone, nor of them alone, but of both, and of everything alive and breathing and moist with either blood or sap in that crystal light, illuminating the world both without and within me. Yet there was something anthropomorphic too about that vision, yet so subtle was the sugges-

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tion that I can only describe it by referring to the similitude in expression between the emu and the blackfellow, or, to draw exotic parallels between the orang-outang and the Malay, or the South American Indian and the spider monkey. It was anthropomorphic to this extent, that it suggested a single essence informing everything sprung from, and fed by, this soil, and that the truest habitation yet gathered together by that essence for itself was the intelligence that peers out upon this world from the dark liquid eyes of the aboriginal.

To be entirely frank, I must admit that my vision at this point degenerated into a farcical dream in which I forfeited my ecstatic state to engage in a ludicrous and humiliating adventure. For, swollen with my seeming omniscience, I now conceived the trivial idea of descending and communicating with my bower birds. No sooner had I formulated this wish than it was gratified. My curious exaltation shrank from me, shuddering out at the soles of my feet precisely as before, and, as it ebbed from me so did I find myself withdrawing from it, dwindling, dwindling till I was again my human self lying on my blankets by the purring log. I must have been asleep now, yet I was not aware of this, for that absurd farce staged by my excited brain followed that wonderful vision without any break. It was just as if I had proved too small for the proffered experience and had been granted this lust-thridden, trivial fantasy, as something more in accord with my true deserts.

For, the very next moment, I was pleased and surprised to hear musical voices, which heralded the arrival of my bower bird couple, who fluttered into the camp in a vast twitter of excitement to invite me to a dance.

'You have never seen our house,' they said. 'Come with us and we will show it you and introduce our daughters.

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We have a party every full moon. It was lucky that your message came to-night.'

I thought so too, and readily accompanied them across a grassy flat that shone like an ocean of silver, to their playground, which I had already located in my preceding phase. But now either I had shrunk, or they had grown, for we were of a size and, all athrill with expectancy, I had no difficulty in entering. Inside I found a roomy parlour with grass walls bent into an arched roof, but what pleased me most was their family, composed of some half-dozen flappers, very attractive, done up in fancy dress as human beings — though I am not quite sure whether they had partially assumed human form or I had become part bird. They were dressed in some flimsy transparent stuff that rippled and rustled like a stream of moonlight over the firm yet supple contours of their little bodies. Gaiety, mystery, and mischief lurked and sparkled in their dark aboriginal eyes. I tell you no modern revue ballet could hold a candle to them. They were fresher, daintier, more attractively gauche, like the pick of a girls' school dancing class. Sardapalus might have kept such a bevy of delicious fledglings in his seraglio to delight his sensual heart with their pretty posturing.

The moonlight streamed through the grass roof so that their shadows played in it like fantastic fish in a pool of silver. And, while they swayed this way and that, pirouetted on their slender toes or hula-huling with their shapely arms, their parents stood by smiling, nodding and twittering with delight, like connoisseurs before a set of masterpieces.

Oh, and I forgot. There was music, a sort of fairy fidget, welling from some unseen source as if an orchestra of highly skilled locusts and frogs had been requisitioned. The nearest approach to it I can recollect is Kreisler's *Polichinelle*

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Serenade or the scampering summons of the Little People in Barrie's *Marie Rose* as I once heard it performed.

Words cannot express my enjoyment of that naive ballet which was further enhanced by a queer consciousness at the back of my mind that the whole affair was really being spun by something in my own brain, something that had come into me that very night with that very moonlight which was its warp and woof, so that the joy of the creative craftsman in the originations of his daemon was added to my natural delight in this simple interplay of gracious rhythms.

Then came a time when the music ceased suddenly and the dancers sank to rest, lightly as the birds they were, on couches of kangaroo grass decorated with purple trumpets of the wild yam and with golden sprays of Christmas-bush.

The nearest fledgling, a dusky sylph, her small breast pressed tightly by her tender palms in a sort of corybantic ecstasy, gazed at me with such mischievous invitation in her large, emu-dark eyes that (here, no doubt, the beef juices aided by suppressed desires took over the stage management) I trembled with longing and could not refrain from moving towards her. But I took one step only. For, at that moment, as if at an alarm signal, the music sprang to life once more and so strangely apposite a thing occurred that even in my dreams I read into it a symbolic meaning.

With the first shrill notes of the hidden orchestra, seemingly from the shadow at my feet, there sprang a grotesque little being I had not noticed before. It had the rapacious head of a butcher bird (though I have thought since it might have been an apparition, debauched and deformed by my frustrated post-war life, of my former woodpecker 'helper'), but its body seemed human, though the legs faded away rather vaguely into bird feet armed with cruel, predatory talons. Right at the nearest girl it sprang, neck-

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feathers a-heckle like a cock itching to tread, arms a-clutch, and eyes, queerly like my own I thought, aflame with desire. The menaced maiden, however, stood her ground coolly, still smiling mischievously, tauntingly, only to melt into air at the first touch of those ravening fingers . . . and to reappear at my feet, all human semblance shed, as a fluffy bower bird chick. Foiled and bewildered, the imp let out a shrill little screech of rage, which was immediately capped by a mocking flourish from the hidden orchestra. With hardly a pause the queer misshapen creature slewed in its course and sprang for the second fledgling, merely to meet with a similar disappointment, whilst another fluffy chick simultaneously appeared at my feet and began a twittering conversation with its sister for all the world like two dancers who have done their turn and tripped off-stage. Like a faun hot-breath in pursuit of a nymph, only to cannon lugubriously into the impregnable bole of the tree-fastness sanctuary into which she has slipped just in time, the little bush devil sped from quarry to quarry to a ludicrously ironical thrumming on the cicada-like fiddles that kept time to his every movement. Then, at the sixth and final failure, the baffled pantaloons in this goblin pantomime swung suddenly in his tracks and came racing with his huge beak agape and a murderous gleam on those frenzied eyes, so weirdly like my own, straight home to me and the fluffy family at my feet. He must not reach them. Hurriedly I sprang to intercept him.

At that moment the music soared to a mocking, triumphant scream, seeming to fling the goblin high in the air with its impetuous ascent as if to whirl him out and away for good and all. But the desperate creature was able to direct his progress into a parabola so that his beak struck me square in the chest to bore its way like a red-hot nail (or like that

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Bohain bullet) deep into my vitals, thereby waking me from my dream with a convulsive leap.

A coal had shot on to my naked breast from the fire.

The night had not lost its magic, but I found myself terribly tired by these abnormal adventures. After reviewing this experience for a short while, I fell into a deep and refreshing sleep.

Next day, a young bull bearing a strange brand sauntered in to the trough. A heifer was on heat and was surrounded by an excited mob of bullocks. The young bull drove them all away contemptuously, yet one big white rawboned bullock was unwise enough to stay and defy him. In the subsequent struggle the white bullock was flung across the trough, whereupon I heard a loud crack as if a young tree had snapped its bole. I thought the trough had gone, but it was the white bullock's shoulder blade. He stood there all night. In the morning he hobbled away in great pain to feed. There was no good feed left within a radius of four miles. He visited the trough twice during the next week. Unfortunately, I had no rifle. Then he disappeared altogether. Weeks later, when riding with the mustering plant out this way, I found his body.

Another victim of bush tragedy was a white calf, whose mother died a few days after his birth. I found her body and burnt it, but the calf was missing. I first saw him when he turned up at the well to make pitiful attempts at pirating milk from cows with offspring of their own. Of course, they brushed him away every time, unless their attention happened to be absorbed in drinking; then he *did* sometimes manage to get a mouthful. I gave him some of my powdered milk from a bottle, but he didn't seem to thrive on it, and it was soon used up. Then he tried chewing twigs and grass, but that only gave him the scours. All the time

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too he was paying visits to the spot where lay his mother's charred carcase. It was heartrending to hear his feebly plaintive and uncomprehending lament. At last, when he was so weak he could hardly stand, I cut his throat. By rights I should have taken that extreme measure at the outset.

One morning I heard a car in the distance and knew by the sound it wasn't Morgan's. It was the windmill man with his truck and parts of a mill. A second truck arrived on his tail with iron for tanks and new troughs.

In four days there was no need for a water-drawer. The cattle lurched shyly around at first, but soon accepted the innovations and sampled the water from the new troughs. I stayed two days more to make sure that there would be water if the wind failed. Then, the tanks being full and no indication of a wind-drought to follow, I walked to another well twelve miles away, whither the windmill man had preceded me. And from his camp I got a lift back to the Vatican, where I was relieved to find I had at last been accepted by the station hands as one of themselves. Dave was making up a fresh mustering plant at that moment. He not only included me in it but let me have two pretty fair horses and a roan yearling who should really not have been broken in so young. What the roan lacked in strength, however, he made up in willingness and good nature, rare traits among the Lilibalili rough stuff. Dave was good enough to indicate his appreciation of this fact when, on handing the roan over to me, he remarked, 'You two ought to suit each other. We've named him *Digger*.'

CHAPTER XX

JOURNEY'S END

I now spent a blissful three months with one mustering plant after another, for there always seemed to be some reason for shifting cattle at this period. This was an experience that had been denied me in Canada. It came all the sweeter for the keeping. True, my bones were a bit older and the ground was no softer, besides I was given plenty of opportunity to weigh these opposing qualities, for there were very few horses on the station who did not try conclusions with their rider at least once during the day's work. They seemed to pick the rockiest spots instinctively, and apparently found particularly deep satisfaction in starting a quarrel right on the brink of some one or other of the numerous old mine-shafts with which parts of the run were pitted.

In October, 10,000 flock ewes arrived at Leonora, two hundred miles away, having travelled from Hay, N.S.W., on foot as far as Broken Hill, and then across the continent by train. From Leonora they were walked in mobs of 2000, by three different routes to the station, where ten paddocks, mostly six miles by three, had been fenced and watered at each corner by wells with mills to receive them. The bogies that had kept the sheepmen out of this country hitherto had been the alleged shortage of water and the very real abundance of dingoes. These vanished before the wand of capital. The constant employment of a dog-stiffener had accounted for eighty odd dingoes so far, so that menace was now well in hand, while, having the money to employ numerous well-sinkers, our owners had swiftly proved that

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water was to be found almost anywhere at an average depth of thirty feet. They could thus keep their paddocks a handy size instead of having to run their fences to widely separated wells, as is inevitable in drier country.

But I had nothing to do with this as yet. I found myself employed all the time out at the end of the run which they had reserved for cattle. Here there was no pressing hurry to fence the land.

There is no great preparation for a mustering trip. The bushman takes this in leisurely fashion, as he takes everything else. The horsebreaker brings in a mob he has tried out (by riding them once), one or two veteran horses are added for night-work, hobbles are softened in fat, the axles of the cook's sulky are greased, such horses as prove shoeable in the time are shod, meat is butchered, the tucker box is filled with flour and potatoes and tinned food from the store and, next morning, we roll our rugs and jog off, driving the spare horses before us.

The cattle are trapped by shutting off the well water just as with sheep. Where there are pools, claypans or rock-holes, we have to work considerably harder to get them. When overtaken by night, where there are no yards we have to watch the cattle, taking two-hour tricks at riding round them. If we are short-handed, or if the cattle are nervous and start drifting off the camp or trickling away in small mobs, one's trick may be considerably longer. In fact, you may have to stay in the saddle most of the night, but this only occurs by reason of bad management or exceptionally bad luck. Usually, if the cattle, after a quiet spell of grazing are dodged easily on to the camping ground, there should be no trouble at all.

But night-herding, cutting-out and branding operations have been so often described, I need not bother with them

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here. Little has been said, however, about the sober round of riding tracks to which we eventually settled after things had quieted down. This too has its amusing incidents, rather sparsely scattered over monotonous stretches, when life crawls drowsily for the stockman. Yet, if I crowd a few into a single day's ride, I think I can give you quite a bush vaudeville entertainment, a real life circus which, like the Roman games, has both its comedy and tragedy, the former being ever on the grim side.

Riding tracks in Australia is the same thing as line-riding in Western America. It is the normal occupation of the stockman when not required for more strenuous work. It is patrol work on which, besides setting right anything that may have gone wrong, the employee notes conditions for future reference so that, if the boss wants to know about possible feed, for instance, he can get reliable information by asking. Nothing escapes an old stockman's notice. He knows the vast stretches he patrols far better than I knew my father's tiny farm. Without for one moment imagining we have reached this stage of efficiency, permit me to invite your company on a day's ride.

Last night we camped at a well. At the first blink of dawn we kick off our blankets; one grabs the bridles and goes after the horses, guided by the sound of their bells (and sometimes misguided by distant bell-birds) while the other prepares breakfast and packs the light gear we carry.

Before we get away a mob of cattle comes in to water, the bulls, stags, and old cows sauntering in as if to-morrow would do, the heifers and young steers arriving in a swirl of dust, scaring the rose-pink breasted galahs, who are sipping the water with jerky clockwork movements like mechanical toys, into a swirling cloud of screaming devils, and slaking their own thirst with many a nervous side-long

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glance. After drinking, the middle-aged members of the party walk quietly away down the well-worn pads by which they have arrived, but the young stuff makes off at a gallop, not, however, before we have noted certain intimate details, as, for instance, that two of the heifers have calved recently, one old stag has collected a bung eye in a recent scrap, and a 9XY cow, evidently a straggler from the lot old Saltbush brought through last month, has joined this mob. For we know all about the movements of the drovers who pass through our run, the brands of their stock and how many they managed to drop, if any, *en route*. Sometime later Saltbush will hear by 'bush wireless' (gossip exchange, in some pub perhaps, a hundred miles away) of the whereabouts of this cow, and will know where to look for her when he comes through again.

Turn number Two is a farce enacted by Mrs. Eaglehawk, a most excitable and suspicious dame. We ride out from the well along a cattle pad which leads us beneath the boughs of a tall gidje tree in which a stout dwelling of twigs has been erected since our last visit. The architect gapes at us over her balcony in great alarm. Her amber eyes and her red-lined gullet spell determination to defend her brood. If we were sheepmen her attitude would be justified, for one of us would in duty bound scale the tree and scatter her fortress with its garrison of eggs or fluffy white eaglets, upon the four winds. We will assume, however, that our run is innocent of sheep and we reserve our energy and our cartridges for dingoes and brumby bulls.

Number Three is provided by two of the aforementioned galloping heifers, the two we noted as recent mothers. We overtake them just as they are picking up the calves they have planted according to immemorial bovine custom when trapesing warily in to water. The joyous reunion with

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its intimate domestic details is abruptly curtailed by our arrival, and wild-eyed mothers and gawky, bucketing, complaining offspring, melt away into the bush as if by magic.

Four occurs at a water-hole, where we bag a dingo who has been making a fish breakfast on an unwary turtle, and thereby scare a mob of brumbies, also lingering late at the pool. They thunder off in a maelstrom of red dust, tossing manes and streaming tails. A creamy stallion, master of the herd, halts, swings round and snorts defiance. As he is a fine specimen, worth his keep for the offspring he will beget, we do not unship our Winchesters. He paws the ground and neighs shrilly, then, as these tactics do not stay our advance, he suddenly concludes it is time he caught up with his harem. So, with a final and most ferocious snort, he swivels away — and, alas for the pomp of equine chivalry, his hind hooves skid from under him and he falls with a squelchy thud, a first-rate 'gutzer', from which he scrambles up in undignified confusion to bound away with our vulgar merriment ringing in his ears. He will rejoin the ladies in a vicious mood.

We eat our noon crib at a native well, the mouth of which has been covered with saplings to strain off the larger animals and prevent them from adding their carcasses to the snake and bungarra soup within. With an important buzzing a policeman fly arrives with a captive and comatose hornet about four times as large as himself. These flies, when in need of a rest, settle and drop their huge burdens. This one is unfortunate. He choses one of the saplings as a landing-ground. Naturally his doped hornet rolls off with the first puff of wind to disappear into the dark depths below. Climax — complete demoralization of our worthy policeman, who circles the pole half a dozen times, searching vainly and uncomprehendingly for his vanished booty. At

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last he flings himself into the air with a savage buzz, just like a scorching mouthful of epithet, and departs in search of a fresh victim.

Our last turn shall be a common enough drama of real life, whether staged in the bush or in town, amongst animals or humans. It is either tragic or comic according to your point of view. At sunset we arrive at a soak where cattle are gathered, having camped there during the heat of the day. They are now stringing away in small parties to their night's grazing, anything from two to four miles away from the water, rarely further. But one excited mob, mostly young bullocks, lingers for all the world like a pub crowd at closing time, to witness a ding-dong set-to between an ancient and massive shouldered stag and a husky young bull. Back and forth the contestants barge, snorting and rumbling in bloodcurdling discord, while the brick-coloured dust rises against the sunset in a blood-red cloud, at times entirely enveloping the champions till they seem like twin gods of war, battling alone in a flaming Valhalla composed solely of their own fiery breath.

Eventually youth and agility prevail. Age and weight take to the bush on the urgent wings of fear, sped on their course by the victor's goading horns as he crashes mercilessly on the heels of the vanquished. This is the moment the crowd has been eagerly awaiting. With bellows of delight they join the rout, mobbing the discomfited bully and slipping a few sharp prods into his aching flanks on their own account. It had been a famous fight, and we too share their excitement, and when the lynching sets in, for a moment I experience again that horrible reptilian exultation, which first invaded me the day I saw that convict flogged at the triangles. Obviously, I am sensitive even to the mob hysteria of horned cattle.

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And the cause of all the trouble? *Cherchez la vache*, of course! There she is, in the cover of that emu-bush, a small, sleek-coated Juno of a poley heifer, pretty as paint. She has already forgotten the brawlers in the blandishments of a third party, an insignificant looking runt with a crafty eye. He has taken advantage of the general excitement to edge her away into a select corner where he now has her temporarily to himself. The blissful couple stand head to tail, currying each other's coats with long blue active tongues. The way of a man with a maid troubled King Solomon not a little. Who shall explain the even greater mystery of the principle on which a female would, if permitted by circumstance, select her mate?

Darwin called the process Natural Selection. The answer to our riddle thus takes a typically feminine turn.

Why did the lady chose the third party?

Well, just naturally!

I saw quite a lot of Tommy, the blackfellow, but he was always very reserved with me, keeping the conversation on a strictly business footing. From the others, however, I learnt his interesting story. Tommy was about seven when he made his debut among the whites. That was fourteen years before I knew him. His tribe had drifted down from Lake Naberu to Lake Way and, when they disappeared once more into the never-never, a very scared little yamergee was left yelling for his mother among the station whites. He had been adopted and duly paid for with a few sticks of tobacco. Tommy soon quit crying and set himself to imitate the ways of his new companions, and so successfully that anything in the way of calf-wrestling or colt-breaking is now meat and drink to him. Any number of peltings fail to make the slightest impression on his hide or his courage. The worst

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horse gets through a surprising amount of work when Tommy sticks his huge flash hooks into his ribs.

One time Tommy went 'pink-eye'. That is, he rejoined his tribe for a holiday. The old men kidded him into it. They undertook to make a man of him. The first thing they did was to drive an eight-inch bone splinter through the cartilage of Tommy's expansive nose. That was enough for Tommy. He developed a passion for hunting, and so managed to hang behind the main body when they took the track. Two old men had been told off to chaperone the debutant warrior. They had been noted sprinters in their time, but age will tell. Tommy made Lake Way a good half-day ahead of them, having run sixty miles 'like plurry hell'. Another time his relatives attempted to regain possession of their prodigal son by driving off the horses from a mustering camp. They knew Tommy would be the first to track down the missing horses, and they reckoned on trapping him alone and perhaps on foot. However, they hadn't reckoned with his horsemanship nor his cunning. Tommy set out on foot all right, and it wasn't long before he spotted why the horses had cleared out, but he was plucky enough to keep following them alone. Having at length found a horse, Tommy was about to slip a bridle over its head when a shout from the bush altered his plans. Tommy was not stopping to parley. The frightened horse reared and plunged, but Tommy's clasp knife was out, the greenhide hobble-strap was slashed through and Tommy was on the animal's back and away before either his mount or his would-be captors had rightly got the strength of what was in his mind. Remained the trivial job of getting the bridle on to the head of that madly galloping horse. Hanging like a monkey on to his mount's neck, Tommy got hold of its tongue and pulled it up all standing, just long enough to slip

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the bit in its mouth and the bridle over its ears. Then he stuck in his hooks again and lit out for the musters' camp. Tommy had a good laugh over that.

Anything in the nature of an adventure is a priceless joke to Tommy. During the bangtail muster he took after a refractory cow and ran her to a standstill. Not being able to drive her out of the thick bush in which she had taken sanctuary, he slipped off his horse, crept up behind her, and, drawing his knife, banged her tail with one slash. The old lady had got her wind back by this time. She promptly turned and charged Tommy, who had just time to swing himself into a beefwood tree, where he crouched on a limb a few inches above her head. That cow was obstinate. She fooled around the bole of that tree snorting and prodding and tossing a pair of business like horns for long enough to make Tommy wonder what his horse was doing all that time. In the end he drove her off by scattering lighted matches in the dry bush below, and nearly roasted himself thereby, for the tinder rose nobly to the scheme.

Tommy was much more nuggety than the blackfellows I saw further north. He always wore boots and leggings and kept himself civilized, never mixing with the degenerate-looking blacks who hung around the town. He even begged to be sent down to Perth with a shipment of cattle, so that he might have a look at the 'big smoke'. While there, I heard, he spent most of his time at the Zoo, for the animals from strange countries interested him hugely. As the Zoo is usually the first place I myself make for when visiting a new city, perhaps there was more kinship between us than Tommy was inclined to credit.

Tommy was the first aboriginal with whom I came into daily contact, but I have observed a few others since then, and the more I see of them the more I suspect they are a

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whole lot shrewder than most white men will admit. The Australoid, with his overhanging brows cast in a perpetual frown, seems to me a study in the Awakening of Thought. The birthpangs of human ascension over the animal are faithfully signalled in that frown. A riddle has been tackled and the initial steps of the solution have proved none too easy. Yet the *pons asinorum* has already been successfully negotiated. An ungenerous environment has been well enough conquered to allow the mind time to ponder on its origins.

Then the white man came and introduced new and insuperable problems. These people are doomed to disappear, as their remote forebears vanished in Europe. Some will be absorbed. The major portion will just fade from the earth. Their days and works are done. They yield this last stage to their doom, which has followed them to this remote continent after untold ages in the persons of their white successors. As for that drop of their blood which will be absorbed by intermarriage it will merely serve to illustrate a biological law. Always under stress of circumstance, both for peoples and individuals, there is a tendency to fit oneself for mergence into whatever overwhelms. And that which survives till it is fit to merge, when we come to look for it, lo, it has vanished already, for it has become embodied in the emergent total. This operation, like most other big natural laws, has been enshrined in ancient myth. In the Parsi scriptures, Gayomard the Primeval Man, is killed by the Angry One, that precious metals and healing plants may emerge from his body. He died that he may emerge into a fuller life. The white man, the child of Lucifer, the light-bearer, is the Angry One in the Twilight chapter of the aboriginal's story. Yet some day that myth will apply to us also in our turn — is applying even now. Progress, ever

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forcing its pace, is steadily eliminating the incurable savages from our midst and embodying the more tractable in the emergent total. And this process has nothing to do with the moral worth of the incurables. It takes place purely on the physical plane, into which the question of spiritual values does not enter. Learn enough to merge or vanish. That is the biological law. And those old mythmakers had already observed that law. Millenniums ago they had reached the solution of that riddle which so puckers Gayomard's brows and which we moderns are at such pains to endorse by scientific research.

Morgan happened to say to me one day that he was finding the book-keeping a considerable strain. His outdoor work now left him no time for it. I said, 'How about trying me?' So he taught me the job, and I spent the next year at the butcher's shop in town wrestling with accounts and preparing monthly trial balance sheets to go to the company's offices in Melbourne. A palatial homestead was now being erected out at the sheep end. Altogether, counting the army of builders, plumbers, electricians, etc., there were for a short period two hundred men employed on that station, which is probably a record for West Australia. With the accounts of the fifty-odd men employed by the building contractor I had nothing to do. All the rest were mine, however, together with the invoices for the large stacks of material used by fencers, windmill men, yard builders, well sinkers, and the telephone line gang. No wonder Morgan had found the job a bit too strenuous.

We had now three hundred and sixty thousand acres fenced, and were in a position to carry up to fourteen thousand head of sheep and eight hundred head of cattle with their increase. The transformation from beef to wool and from sparsely watered open range to well-watered

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paddocks had been accomplished in eighteen months. The remaining development could proceed without any forcing of the pace. The rush of accounts began to slacken. At the end of my year indoors I was able to go back to the cattle end for a breath of fresh air. I now lived at the slaughter yards and it was my job, besides riding tracks and fences, to keep the butcher supplied with killers. This job soon saddened me. Inevitable killing for food had never weighed on my conscience, and, of course, this wholesale killing for town and mine consumption was inevitable too. Still the very fact that it was wholesale made all the difference to me. The butcher was a good fellow, yet his callous indifference to blood-spilling got on my nerves. Residence at the slaughter yards brought home the ultimate meaning of the cattle business all too vividly, for I am one who can never forget the 'valuableness of cattle', that they are not just self-supporting vials of vim, but are in truth as large a factor in the story of man's struggles with his environment as the horse or iron or John Barleycorn. Even when slaughtering, I cannot escape that disturbing emotion which the ancients knew so well, that always, on Mithraic altar pieces, they represented the bull-slayer with eyes averted from his victim's agony. In that religion of soldierly comradeship, it was felt that not only the mighty Mithras but the strength-yielding bovine victim was Man's friend.

Soon my aversion to this sanguinary end of the business became an obsession, the desire for fresh fields reawakened and one day I said good-bye to Wiluna, intending perhaps to return some day, for the place had taken a strong hold on my affections.

My subsequent story resolves itself into a spell of newspaper work in Perth, varied by a break of another year of station life on the Ashburton river.

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Returning south, I resumed my round of free-lancing, odd jobs and odder distractions, surrendering myself to that attraction which Perth, alone of cities, had always held for me. West Australia is one of the world's backwaters, a stagnant Eden, blessed (or cursed, according to your point of view) with a delightfully unstimulating climate. Nor does the climate make for degeneration. One just stays put, as Westralia ('Swanland' as some who think it deserves a fairer name would like to see it called) has stayed put since the first cooling of the earth's crust. It is the land where the primitive grass trees have dreamed through millenniums, while empires (and even mountain ranges) have risen and subsided elsewhere. If Rip Van Winkle had set out to indulge in a really long sleep he would have found the Darling Range the pleasantest and stablest of bedrooms, for those hills had selected their stance long before the Alleganians had prominence thrust upon them, while the Grampians of Eastern Australia are but new born babes compared with them. None of your volcanic or radio active nonsense can cause a quaver here. And the lethargy of the environment is endemic in its human occupants. But the people of Swanland make valiant efforts. They have been there only a hundred years as yet. And among the people of Perth I found sufficient stimulation to revive and to realize an ambition which had been mine since childhood. I had always wished to publish a volume decorated with my own drawings. So I made and decorated a selection of my own verses, and, with the help of a member of the Returned Soldiers' League, a body which stands loyally by its members, I published these under the title of *Austral Pan*, an earthy volume which brought me an enthusiastic review from the pen of that Chiron of Australian poets and ever generous champion of fantastic endeavour, Hugh McCrae.

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My R.S.L. friends were delighted, and I found myself for the first time in my life in regular employment on a reputable weekly. But, alas! I was not given a free hand. I soon found my Pegasus languishing when compelled to travel in hobbles. Being an incurable brumby, he first threw himself about, then sulked and would in no wise submit to team work. In fact he proved himself to be, just what I would always have him, one of the doomed unmergeables. In a year I found myself again a free-lance and a discredited one at that.

That, however, was a small matter. Had I not by some rare chance established a secret connection so intriguing that no material reversal could ever again seem more formidable than the posturing of phantoms? I went back to my invocations. Firmly believing that the realization of my ambition to publish a volume that should be well received had been accomplished only with the assistance of my invisible well-wisher, I now begged that mysterious guardian to grant me one supreme boon. What mattered to me now as ever was my perpetual loneliness. Though I had long regarded the search as almost hopeless, surely somewhere in the world must exist some human mate for me, one who should be more than a mere companion in pleasure or convenience! That it had never occurred to me to make this plea before must be set down to the fact that I had long ago become cynically despondent in this vital matter, years, in fact, before I had stumbled on the truth that there is a Providence which looks after fools, or, at least, a Something which seems inclined to help one fool.

So now I made this prayer with all my heart — that is to say, with all that passion, accumulated throughout the years, which revived hope had freed from the shackles of despair. And — miracle of miracles! — my plea proved

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urgent enough to arouse that Something to engineer its absolute satisfaction, and, moreover, with breathless despatch. Peddling a prospectus for a new and entirely useless magazine, I walked into a small library and there found employed, and immediately recognized, the one person for whom I had waited half a lifetime. That was three years ago. Every minute of the ensuing period had proved only an added confirmation of that certainty.

The life of the individual is a dream in which the past of his race is recapitulated. In the seclusion of the womb he is permitted to review in synopsis the prehuman prelude to his now sapient estate. As a boy he lives again the lives of the caveman, the hunter, the herdsman, during which periods, like his forebears, he is the protégé of Pan, the oldest sponsor of mankind. Then, at the stage when the other sex begins to exert its attraction, he passes into the service of the Earth Mother. Beyond lie Dionysus, Apollo, Lucifer, Christ. Beyond also lies the path leading downward to the dark canyoned realm where Pluto reigns. Many find this path the easier to take, for the road back to the sunlit garden, once they have essayed that fatal fork, is hedged off from them by the economic schemes of those who have already entered the service of that exacting ruler. Caught early, schooled thereto by parent and pedagogue, they resign themselves almost willingly to their grisly fate and dive deeper and deeper into that monotonous labyrinth from which escape, though not impossible, is so hardly come by that it has been said it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

As for me, I entertain no fears at this juncture of golden shackles. Only after years of wandering in the fastnesses of Arcadia have I come to the garden of the Earth Mother. Only with my arrival in Australia did my 'helper' intimate

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that my period of probation was nearing its end. Then I was sent this dear guide to lead me safely past that fatal cross-ways. I did not skimp my service to Pan. I gave full measure. Be sure I shall not hurry through these mysteries either. Time enough for service to Pluto, if need be, in some other existence. With a wife to whom moonlight and the wind in the reeds and the lap of the waves mean more than all the turmoil of humanity, it is likely I shall now never know need of progression to any other circle of ministry. No more useless peddling of useless products henceforth.

It is possible, quite seriously, that all Evil in the world of man originally was born of the fact that Adam and Eve were incompatible — this surmise is made by Count Keyserling. Certainly all my previous unrest was the child of my long series of fruitless endeavours to discover the one not incompatible Eve . . . or Lilith. A stranger myself among my fellows, by all dead reckoning, I have at last happened upon another stranger, who is yet no stranger to me. Together we have found our way back under the hill — that other hill where Pluto does not reign.

Fairy gold, boy! . . . If the sins of your youth are forgiven you, you're well to live. Gold! all gold!

